EMPIRES OF THE WORLD

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

A HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

MEHRDAD KIA

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The Persian Empire

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A Historical Encyclopedia

Volume I

Mehrdad Kia

Empires of the World

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For my mother, Kiadokht Kia

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PREFACE

The Persian Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia is primarily focused on the great dynasties of pre-Islamic Iran, namely the Medes, the Achaemenids, the Seleucids, the Arsacids (Parthians), and the Sasanians. Also included are entries on the legendary royal houses of Greater Iran, specifically the Pishdadian and the Kayanian dynasties, as well as on the important personages who served and fought for them. Throughout this two-volume encyclopedia, the terms "Iran" and "Greater Iran" are used as equivalent to the term "Persia" to refer to the ancient culture and society that produced the Median, Achaemenid, Arsacid, and Sasanian Empires. The reason for this is simple. In antiquity as today, the term "Persia" merely referred to a province within Greater Iran, namely the southern Iranian province of Parsa (Persis in Greek) and not the entire Iranian world, which contained a variety of Iranian- and non-Iranian-speaking peoples. Persians were one group among numerous Iranian groups, which included the non-Persian-speaking Medes, Parthians, Chorasmians, Bactrians, Sogdians, Scythians, and many others. These groups were Iranian by culture, and language, but they were not Persian. Thus, the word "Persia" is not equivalent to the word "Iran" but only refers to a province and a subculture within the Iranian universe. Two of Greater Iran's ancient dynasties—the Medes and the Arsacids—were Iranian but not Persian, while the Achaemenids and the Sasanians were Persian in their origin and language.

It is important to note that when speaking of Iran we are not referring to the present-day country of Iran. In ancient times, Iran constituted a vast political and cultural domain, and Iranian-speaking people inhabited a much larger territory. Present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Azerbaijan as well as parts of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor served as the home for this rich civilization and culture. In other words, the Greater Iran of ancient times incorporated modern Iran but was not confined to it.

All of the Iranian empires of the pre-Islamic era contained a mosaic

of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Each group possessed its own history, culture, language, religious customs, and traditions. The Iranian groups included the Persians, the Medes, the Parthians, the Hyrcanians, the Arians, the Chorasmians, the Sogdians, the Bactrians, the Arachosians, the Drangians, and others, while non-Iranian groups included Armenians, Assyrians, Arabs, Greeks, Jews, Babylonians, and others. No account of ancient Iran can therefore claim to be comprehensive unless it covers the history and cultures of all peoples and communities who contributed to the diversity, growth, and prosperity of Greater Iran's pre-Islamic empires. The present volumes make no pretense of providing a thorough and all-inclusive synopsis of ancient Iran's history and culture. Far from it, this encyclopedia, comprising 241 individual entries, is designed as an introductory outline, providing high school and college students as well as general readers who might not have prior knowledge or expertise on the subject with a broad overview and a general understanding of some of the main ideas, religious concepts, personages, and events in the rich history of ancient Iran.

The Persian Empire is designed as a research tool dedicated to the study of the pre-Islamic civilization of Greater Iran. Because no other encyclopedia of ancient Iran has been written for the exclusive use of high school and university undergraduate students, this reference source will fill a significant gap presently encountered by those who plan to study or research the history of the ancient Near East. *The Persian Empire* will benefit not only high school and university students but also the general reader interested in Iranian life and culture. Now more than ever, it is critical for us to understand the history of this ancient civilization and teach our students its place and role in world history. This encyclopedia will therefore provide a timely resource for understanding the history and culture of the Iranian-speaking peoples. The geographical focus of this encyclopedia will be limited to regions that were populated by ancient Iranians in antiquity as well as to countries and territories ruled by the empires of the Medes, Achaemenids, Seleucids, Arsacids (Parthians), and Sasanians. The time span covered extends from the arrival of ancient Iranians on the Eurasian steppes and the Iranian plateau in antiquity to the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651 CE. The text has been supplemented with photographs, maps, and cross-references as well as a chronology of major events, a glossary, a bibliography of print and electronic resources suitable for both university undergraduate and high school student research, a selection of primary document excerpts, an appendix listing the dynasties of pre-Islamic Iran, and a detailed subject index, making this encyclopedia a useful addition to existing reference collections.

INTRODUCTION

The Persian Empire, compared with what preceded it, was a miracle. It brought peace, … from outside attack. … It brought justice; though the famously just Royal Judges make no appearance in our book. … It brought prosperity, for the Persians devoted themselves (as Xenophon in the *Oeconomicus* stresses) to the improvement of agriculture. The Persians were the great gardeners of antiquity. Cyrus [the Younger] declared to an astounded Lysander that he gardened daily when not on campaign and had himself laid out a park at Sardis, his "paradise" (to give the Greek version of the Old Persian word for a garden, firdu). In similar spirit they attended to agriculture in general, both maintaining carefully the ancient canals of Babylonia … and making improvements in irrigation throughout the empire, as the prophet of Isaiah XL–LV foretold. Likewise with communications. The great roads they built were for the movement of armies, … but they served the purposes of peace as well. The Suez canal was built by Darius I purely for trade; the whole of empire from India to the Aegean was to be linked by sea as well as by land. All in all, Persia was one of the chief civilizing forces of history, and the Greeks in calling them "barbarians," as they called all who did not speak Greek, have greatly misled posterity.

George Cawkwell, Introduction to Xenophon's *The Persian Expedition*

Now as for the stories invented by Herodotus and certain writers on Egyptian affairs, who deliberately preferred to the truth the telling of marvelous tales and the invention of myths for the delectation of their readers, these we shall omit, and we shall set forth only what appears in the written records.

Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History,* Book 1

The real fact is, young Europe is whipped and schooled into admiration of Greece, till no one dares give a candid opinion. Otherwise, how can men in their senses affect to believe all that stuff about the invasion of Xerxes?

Edward E. Eastwick, *Journal of a Diplomat's Three Years' Residence in Persia*

There is no foreign land. It is the traveler only that is foreign.

Robert Louis Stevenson

Anyone who knows, and knows that he knows,
Makes the stallion of intellect leap over the dome of heaven.
Anyone who does not know, but knows that he does not know,
He will nevertheless make his lame little donkey arrive at destination.
Anyone who does not know, and does not know that he does not know
Is trapped for ever in double ignorance

Persian poem by anonymous poet

I was 12 years old when I first visited the archaeological monuments of ancient Iran. I accompanied my parents, who had decided to travel from the capital city of Tehran to the city of Shiraz in the southern province of Fars during the Persian New Year, Nowruz, and visit their friends and colleagues. Because Shiraz is located approximately 422 miles (nearly 680 kilometers) south of Tehran, we decided to divide the trip into two halves by making a four-day stop in the city of Isfahan, 250 miles (402 kilometers) south of Tehran. I had heard a great deal about the breathtaking magnificence of Isfahan, but no one could have prepared me for the majesty and exquisite artistic beauty that the city's arts and architecture offer. Isfahan served as the capital of the Safavid dynasty (r. 1501–1722) from 1598 to 1722. The Safavid monarchs, particularly Shah Abbas the Great (r. 1571–1629), built numerous palaces, mosques, schools, bazaars, and bridges in the city. During our short stay we visited the historic Chahar Bagh Avenue, the Chehel Sotun Palace, the Hasht Behesht Garden, the world-renowned Naqsh-e Jahan Square, the Shah Mosque, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, the Āli Qapu Palace, the Grand Bazaar, the Menar Jonban Mausoleum, and the Zoroastrian fire temple at Ateshgah on the western edge of the city. Crossing the Zayandeh Rud into the Armenian enclave of Julfa and visiting its magnificent church was the crowning experience in this short but eye-opening excursion.

I was filled with excitement when we departed Isfahan for Shiraz. My parents had spoken to me about the ancient dynasties of pre-Islamic Iran: the Medes, the Achaemenids, the Arsacids or the Parthians, and the Sasanians. I understood from these conversations that the province of Fars or the ancient Parsa was the birthplace of two of these dynasties, namely the Achaemenids and the Sasanians. For a young boy my age, traveling to a region that had given birth to two of ancient Iran's great dynasties was a dream come true. As our car approached Pasargadae and later Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis, I could not contain my excitement. Here in front of my eyes stood the architectural remains of the ancient Persian Achaemenids who created a vast empire, which at its apex stretched from the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan to the Danube River in Southeastern Europe and from the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in Central Asia to Libya in North Africa.

At Pasargadae we visited the simple but majestic tomb of Cyrus II the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty who is mentioned in the Old Testament as the Lord's Anointed and God's Messiah. Cyrus liberated the Jews after his conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE. The Jews who had lived in captivity in Babylon were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar. A short distance from Pasargadae

we stopped at Naqsh-e Rostam, which served as the royal necropolis or burial site for four kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty. I was astonished by the sight of the rock-carved tombs of four of the Achaemenid dynasts, Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), Xerxes (r. 486–465 BCE), Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE), and Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE). During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE), Naqsh-e Rostam emerged as an important center for royal and religious ceremonies. Several Sasanian rock reliefs are carved at the base of the cliff below the tombs of the Achaemenid kings. The most impressive among these is the gigantic relief that depicts the victory of the second Sasanian king, Shapur I (r. 240/241/242–270/272 CE), over Roman emperor Valerian in 260 CE. The Persian monarch sits on his horse, while Valerian kneels in front of him. Another impressive structure at Naqsh-e Rotam is the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster), which faces the rock of Hossein Kuh where the four Achaemenid royal tombs are cut into the cliff. The tower-shaped building stands opposite the tomb of Darius II. The Ka'ba, which was probably built sometime during Achaemenid rule, contains a staircase and a door as well as blind windows in dark gray limestone on all four sides. No one knows with any certainty how the building acquired its name. It was certainly not a Zoroastrian temple or shrine, and there are no indications that pilgrims visited the site. Today most scholars consider the tower-shaped structure to be an Achaemenid royal tomb. During the reign of the Sasanian monarch Shapur I, three royal inscriptions in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek were incised into the three walls of the building. The only wall without an inscription is the entrance wall on the north side. Shapur's inscription provides the reader with the royal lineage of the Sasanian monarch, the countries he ruled, and his triumphs over three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. Below Shapur's inscription, the powerful Zoroastrian high priest Kartir added his own inscription.

We drove from Naqsh-e Rostam to the ruins of the palace complex of Persepolis, which was built by the Persian Achaemenid monarch Darius I and his successors. The magnificent royal complex included reception halls, audience halls, private quarters, and a large treasury. Persepolis was burned and destroyed by the Macedonian conqueror Alexander in 330 BCE. Our trip to the beautiful city of Shiraz, the resting place for two of the Persian world's greatest poets, Sa'di (1210–1291/1292) and Hafez (1315–1390), as well as the home to numerous architectural wonders, such as the Citadel of Karim Khan (Arg-e Karimkhani), the Mosque of Vakil and its exceptional tile work, the Old Friday Mosque (Masjed-e Atigh), the theological School of Khan (Madresseh-ye Khan), and the famous and popular Garden of Eram (Bagh-e Eram), dazzled my eyes and awakened me to the

brilliance of the Iranian artists and architects of the past.

Two years after the trip to southern Iran, I accompanied my parents on a trip to the two western Iranian cities of Hamedan and Kermanshah. In Hamedan or ancient Hagmatana (Greek: Ecbatana), which served as the capital of the Median Empire and later as the summer capital for the Achaemenid and Parthian Arsacid Empires, we visited Esther and Mordechai, a Jewish shrine. Next came a visit to the mausoleum of Abu Ali Sina (Ibn Sina), known in medieval Europe as Avicenna, the celebrated Persian physician and philosopher, and the tomb of the 11th-century mystic and poet Baba Taher Oryan. At Ganj Nameh, a few miles outside of the city, we saw the royal inscriptions of the Persian Achaemenid kings Darius I and Xerxes carved in granite.

On the road from Hamedan to Kermanshah we first stopped at an ancient site, identified by some as the temple of Anahita (Anahid), the Iranian goddess of water, in the city of Kangavar and then proceeded on for an unforgettable visit to Bisotun and the rock inscription of the Achaemenid king Darius I. Finally, during a long stay in Kermanshah we visited the Sasanian rock reliefs at Taq-e Bostan (Garden's Arch), a short distance from the city.

The trips to Isfahan, Shiraz, Hamedan, and Kermanshah instilled in me a deep interest in the rich history and culture of ancient Iran. I began to read the works of classical writers as well as any book or article written by scholars that I could get my hands on. The years of reading, studying, and traveling inside and outside Iran, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, only deepened my fascination. From the very beginning, I could not escape the fundamental fact that the field of Iranian history and culture suffers from the paucity of primary sources, including books, historical narratives, chronicles, and documents written by Iranians. The meagerness of written Iranian sources have forced historians to rely heavily on the writings of the Greeks and Romans, who were not only hostile and biased toward Iranians but also ignorant about the diverse and complex cultures and societies that flourished within the boundaries of various Iranian states. The majority of these writers did not speak any Iranian language, had never traveled or lived in an Iranian-populated region or community, and showed no genuine interest in and appreciation for the country's rich and complex civilization. Their scanty knowledge was also limited for the most part to the western provinces of Greater Iran. Thus, in their writings they frequently ignored the Iranian hinterland as well as the vast and important eastern provinces of Greater Iran, which enjoyed close political, cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties with such important centers of world civilization as China and India. Worse, at times gossip, malice, and spite as well as

wild legendary accounts infected their narratives. Engrossed with exotic tales of sex, violence, greed, and betrayal, they often portrayed the Iranian states as arrogant and barbarian imperial powers that emerged from nowhere and conquered the world by luck, treachery, deceit, and brutality. Unfortunately, our perception of ancient Iran in the West continues to be shaped by this narrow, simplistic, and Manichaean narrative, which views ancient Iran as a mere antithesis of ancient Greece, with the former representing oriental despotism and the latter embodying freedom and democracy. And yet despite all their deficiencies and biases, it would be absurd to suggest that we should ignore and discard the writings of classical authors, for they are in fact among the most important foundations of our knowledge about ancient Persia. Without these writings, our knowledge of ancient Iran would be minuscule, limited to a small number of rock inscriptions and reliefs as well as archaeological finds, which though highly valuable cannot possibly be sufficient for writing a cohesive historical narrative. Notwithstanding all their shortcomings, the works of the ancient Greek and Roman authors provide us with a wealth of valuable and vital information without which we would not be able to study the rich and fascinating history of ancient Iran. Instead of taking these writings at face value, however, the task of scholars should be to piece through and identify the factual and reliable information while at the same time discarding the fictitious, ahistorical, and legendary.

The ancient Iranians traced their origins to Indo-Europeans who roamed the vast Eurasian steppes east of the Volga River between 5000 and 2000 BCE. They most probably lived in a society that consisted of two principal social groups, namely priests and herdsmen. These early Iranians practiced ancestor worship. They also venerated natural forces and made offerings to fire, wind, and water and believed in a multiplicity of gods. Among these gods, the greatest was Ahura Mazda (lord of wisdom). Aside from Ahura Mazda, there were also lesser deities such as Mithra (the guardian of covenants as well as the sun god) and Anahita (the goddess of water). With the advent of the Bronze Age, there appeared the horse-drawn chariots and a new class of warriors. In contrast to the majority pastoralist population, which remained wedded to herding animals, the new warrior class adopted a life of fighting and raiding. It is from this new class that new leaders or warrior chiefs emerged. The growing power of the warrior class, who were introducing violence, death, and destruction, ignited an outcry from the majority pastoralist population. As the cultural leaders of their society, the priests began to voice the grievances of cattle herders denouncing violence and calling for compassion and justice. The Iranian prophet Zarathushtra or Zarathustra, known in the West as Zoroaster, most probably emerged

at this historical juncture.

The date for Zoroaster is uncertain. He most probably lived in great antiquity, many centuries before the formation of Iranian kingdoms by the Medes and the Persians on the Iranian plateau. The language used by the Iranian prophet belonged to an eastern Iranian group, leading some scholars to conclude that Zarathustra preached his religion either somewhere in the southern regions of Central Asia, such as Chorasmia on the lower reaches of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) south of the Aral Sea, or Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan. In his poetical and personal poems and hymns known as the Gathas, Zoroaster spoke about the violence and brutality of nomadic warriors who showed no mercy and compassion toward the cattle herders. He also introduced a new religion whose teachings left a profound impact on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as on Greek and Roman religious practices and thought. Zoroastrianism, the religion that was founded based on his teachings, provided ideas and concepts that proved fundamental to shaping the world's major faiths as we know them today.

The Iranian prophet worshipped Ahura Mazda, the architect of the universe and everything that was good and beautiful. Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy immortals called Amesha Spentas. These holy immortals had been brought into existence by Ahura Mazda to help him with completing the creation of the world. The six holy immortals, together with Ahura Mazda and his holy spirit Spenta Mainyu, constituted the Heptad, or the holy seven in Zoroastrian teachings.

Ahura Mazda, who stood for truth and righteousness, was opposed by an adversary, the evil spirit Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), a wicked, destructive, and deceitful force who had given birth to lie, falsehood, decay, and death. In the struggle between Ahura Mazda, the good, and Angra Mainyu, the evil, human beings were free to choose the path of truth and righteousness or falsehood and lie. Those who adopted good thoughts, good words, and good action as the foundation of their personal ethics were to enjoy a life of peace and tranquility here and hereafter. Those who chose the lie over the truth and adopted evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds were condemned to a life of pain and suffering in this life and beyond.

The date for the arrival of the Iranian-speaking groups on the Iranian plateau is uncertain and subject to a great deal of speculation. In the seventh century BCE, the Medes emerged as the first Iranian group to establish a powerful state in the territory of present-day Iran. They were an Iranian-speaking group who arrived in western Iran at a thus far undetermined date. Evidence regarding the origins of the

Medes and the internal organization of their society is meager. Archaeological excavations at Median sites in western Iran have so far produced valuable but scanty results. The Assyrian royal inscriptions as well as Babylonian chronicles shed some light on isolated events and encounters between the Medes and their neighbors, particularly the Assyrians, but do not provide any clear outline of Median history, politics, and social organization. Herodotus provides a wealth of information, but under closer scrutiny his narrative is found to be riddled with fictitious stories and legendary tales.

Before the arrival of the Medes in western Iran, the Zagros mountain range was home to numerous non-Iranian groups. The most prominent among these were the Qutis, the Lullubis, and the Kassites who had settled in the present-day western Iranian province of Luristan. From the 14th to the 11th century BCE, Elamite and Assyrian kings organized military campaigns against these mountain communities to collect booty in slaves, horses, gold, and silver.

The Medes were mentioned for the first time in the royal inscription of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BCE), who stated that he had destroyed Median cities, killing their warriors and carrying off spoils and booty. Though the Assyrians penetrated the Median territory and plundered towns, they do not seem to have retained their hold on the country at this time. The son and successor of Shalmaneser III, Shamsi Adad V (r. 823–811 BCE), attacked and defeated the Medes, devastating and destroying Sagbitu, the royal city of a Median chief, along with 1,200 of the chief's smaller cities. The Medes are mentioned again in the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III (r. 810–783 BCE), who lists them as one of the tributaries of the Assyrian state. The royal inscriptions from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 BCE) also make reference to Media as one of the countries invaded, plundered, destroyed, and burned by his armies.

Several of Tiglath-pileser III's successors, particularly Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE), Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE), Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE), and Ashurbanipal (r. 669–627 BCE), tried with varying success to impose Assyrian rule over the Medes. Sargon II perhaps tried harder than any other Assyrian monarch to subjugate the "mighty Medes," who "had cast off the yoke of Ashur [Assyria], and were scattered over mountain and desert, like [thieves]" (Luckenbill: II:23, 24). The Assyrian king claimed that he conquered and brought within the border of Assyria 34 districts of the Medes, turned their lands "into deserted mounds," and received tribute from "22 city prefects of the mighty Medes in form of horses, mules, cattle and sheep" (Luckenbill: II:15, 23, 24, 58).

The references made in Assyrian inscriptions clearly demonstrate

that there were numerous fortified towns ruled by Median chiefs in the western part of present-day Iran, most probably southeast of Lake Orumiyeh (Urmia) in extreme northwestern Iran. Assyrian royal inscriptions also make frequent reference to Media as one of the countries invaded, plundered, destroyed, and burned by Assyrian armies. The Assyrian kings claimed that they annexed the lands and cities of powerful Medes, carrying off booty and forcing them to pay tribute in the form of people, horses, mules, camels, cattle, and sheep. To establish tighter control over the Median populated territory, at least one Assyrian king installed royal eunuchs as provincial governors responsible for collecting taxes. The Assyrians, however, were not content with collecting booty and imposing direct rule over the Medes. They also deported conquered populations and resettled them in Assyria. Like other groups who had been conquered by the Assyrians, many Medes were forced to move out of their homes and resettle in Assyria. Another tool of co-option and integration was the recruitment of fighting men from conquered areas into the Assyrian army. This policy undermined the military cohesiveness of the conquered people, who lost any potential to resist Assyrian domination. It also allowed the Assyrian state to erase the identity of the non-Assyrian population groups and assimilate their best fighters and units into the Assyrian military hierarchy.

The references to the Medes in Assyrian inscriptions portray a society divided into numerous urban and rural communities, each led by its own chieftain who ruled from his own walled fortress. Representations of military campaigns on Assyrian reliefs depict Median fortresses “with towers and crenellated battlements” (Curtis: 32). However, no single ruler or central government controlled the entire Median territory. These sources also indicate that toward the end of the eighth century BCE, the Medes controlled the area extending from central Iran in the east to the Zagros Mountains in the west.

Despite numerous military campaigns, the Assyrians could not retain their hold on the Medes and successfully integrate them into their political system. The distance between Media and the core territory of the Assyrian kingdom in present-day northern Iraq, the rugged nature of the terrain in which the Medes lived, and their fragmented and decentralized political and social organization made it extremely difficult for the Assyrians to impose their authority over them. But the disjointed and fragmented social organization also gave rise to infighting among various Median communities and leaders. Assyrian royal inscriptions indicate that the Medes fought among themselves. The power struggle and squabbling among the Median leadership reached such a point that at least on one occasion several

Median leaders brought along large thoroughbred horses and blocks of precious lapis lazuli as gifts to the Assyrian court at Nineveh, opposite present-day Mosul in northern Iraq, where they sought the protection of the Assyrian king against their own Median vassals, who had posed a threat to their power.

The Assyrian kings used the infighting among the Medes to impose authority over them, exacting tribute and taxes from their chieftains in the form of people, horses, cattle, sheep, and Bactrian camels. Despite the fragmentation and infighting, which engrossed the Medes, they had become sufficiently powerful to force Esarhaddon to conclude vassal treaties, in which the Assyrian monarch "sought to enlist the support of the Medes in ensuring a peaceful succession to the throne of Assyria" (Curtis: 32). By the time Ashurbanipal (r. 668–627 BCE) ascended the Assyrian throne, the Medes had emerged as an independent and powerful state. As a justification for attacking Median cities and carrying their spoils back with him to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, the Assyrian king cites a certain Median chieftain who had thrown off the Assyrian yoke (Luckenbill: II:854). No reference exists, however, of Median chiefs paying tribute to the Assyrian king or appealing to him to intervene in their internal conflicts.

The death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE signaled the beginning of the end for the Assyrian kingdom. A fierce civil war erupted shortly after Ashurbanipal's passing. Local rulers who had been intimidated by the power of Assyria rose in rebellion and proclaimed their independence. In the autumn of 615 the Medes crossed the Zagros Mountains and captured Arrapha (present-day Kirkuk in northern Iraq). Then in the summer of 614, the Median king Huvakhshtra, who appears as Cyaxares in Herodotus's *Histories,* captured Tarbisu and proceeded to sack the city of Ashur, the first capital of the Assyrian state and second only to Nineveh in political and economic importance. The inhabitants of Ashur were slaughtered, their temples were destroyed, and state treasures were plundered before the city was razed. Those who survived the massacre were carried off as prisoners. Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, who had reached Ashur with his army after it had been seized and destroyed by the Medes, met with the king of the Medes outside the city, and the two monarchs concluded a treaty of peace and friendship. In the summer of 612, the Babylonians and Medes joined forces and marched against the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. After a siege and several fierce battles, the city was finally conquered.

The fall of Nineveh was a deathblow to the Assyrian state. The Assyrian king Sin-sharr-ishkun (r. 627–612 BCE) was most probably killed during the final assault, but parts of his army under the

command of Ashuruballit (r. 612–609 BCE) escaped to Harran in northern Mesopotamia (present-day southeastern Turkey). Once in Harran, Ashuruballit sat on the throne as the king of Assyria. He intended to regroup his forces and receive assistance from Necho II, the pharaoh of Egypt. In 610 the Medes and the Babylonians, who were determined to prevent the resurgence of the Assyrian state, merged their forces again and marched against Ashuruballit, who abandoned Harran and retreated to Carchemish on the western bank of the Euphrates River. But the Assyrians refused to accept defeat. In 609 BCE with assistance from Egypt, Ashuruballit attacked Harran but failed to recapture the town after the king of Babylon, Nabopolassar, arrived with his army to rescue the besieged garrison. Ashuruballit was most probably killed sometime during this campaign, since his name is not mentioned again. The remnants of the Assyrian army along with support from Egypt fought desperately to expel the enemy, but they were defeated for the last time in 605 BCE at Carchemish and Hamath in Syria. After centuries of domination, the Neo-Assyrian state ceased to exist, and its territory was divided between the Babylonians and the Medes.

The Median conquest of Nineveh and the disintegration of the Assyrian kingdom were followed by the incorporation of Assyrian territory into the emerging Median Empire. The Medes expanded their territorial possessions in the west by defeating the Scythians and the Mannaeans. With the Medes seizing the eastern regions of Asia Minor, the kingdom of Lydia emerged as the neighbor of the Medes to the west. In 585 BCE, after fighting a series of inconclusive wars with Lydia that dominated the central and western regions of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), the Medes concluded a peace treaty with the Lydians that established the Halys River (Kizilirmak River in present-day eastern Turkey) as the boundary between Lydia and Media. This treaty of peace and friendship was cemented through an arranged marriage between the daughter of the king of Lydia and the son of the king of Media, who appears as Astyages, the last ruler of the Median kingdom, in Herodotus's *Histories*. To the east, the Medes extended their domain to Parthia in present-day northeastern Iran and perhaps even to Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan.

The Median kingdom was overthrown by Cyrus II, the ruler of Anshan, a kingdom in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars. Cyrus, his father Cambyses I, and his grandfather Cyrus I were vassals of the Medes. According to Herodotus, Cyrus was a grandson of Astyages, the ruler of the Median Empire through his mother Mandane, the daughter of the Median king who married a Persian named Cambyses. This claim cannot, however, be validated. Sometime in 554/553 or 550/549 BCE, Cyrus revolted and defeated Astyages.

According to a Babylonian chronicle, the Median army revolted against its king and delivered him to Cyrus, who attacked and captured the Median capital, seizing the royal residence and carrying the silver, gold, and other valuables of the country back with him to Anshan. The classical sources, including Herodotus and Polyaenus, held Cyrus responsible for instigating a rebellion. Herodotus claimed that Astyages summoned Cyrus to his court after learning that the Persians intended to revolt and free themselves from Median yoke, but Cyrus responded by sending a threatening message to the Median king that he would pay him a visit sooner than the king would desire. Polyaenus reported that Cyrus was defeated in three different battles with the Medes. Despite these setbacks, he rallied his men and led them in a fourth battle with the Medes at Pasargadae near the present-day city of Shiraz in southern Iran. The Persians were defeated again and fled the battlefield, but when they saw their wives and children, they were "ashamed of themselves and turned around to face the enemy," routing the Medes "who were pursuing in disorder" and winning "so great a victory that Cyrus no longer needed another battle against them" (Plyaenus: 7.6.1).

This victory allowed Cyrus to unify the Persians and the Medes into a single kingdom and incorporate the former provinces of the Median state in the east and the west into his possessions. As a successor to the Median kings, Cyrus was recognized as the ruler of the eastern provinces of the Median state, including Hyrcania, the region of modern Gorgan in northern Iran and Parthia, that corresponded with the western regions of Iranian Khorasan. His rule at this time may have extended as far east as Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan. In the west, the fall of the Median Empire allowed Cyrus to emerge as the master of Assyria and Urartu in eastern Asia Minor (present-day Armenia and eastern Turkey). The empire of Cyrus now became a neighbor to the wealthy and powerful Lydia, a kingdom that ruled the central and western regions of Asia Minor.

In 547 BCE, Cyrus clashed with Croesus, the king of Lydia, who was known as one of the wealthiest men of his time. The first battle between the Persians and the Lydians was inconclusive. After the end of the battle, Croesus returned to his capital of Sardis for the winter, hoping to rest his troops and regroup. He also sent messages to his allies, including Sparta and Egypt, requesting support. Instead of returning to the interior of his kingdom, however, Cyrus attacked Sardis and captured it. The fall of Lydia was followed by the conquest of Caria and Lycia as well as the Greek cities of Asia Minor by Cyrus's generals.

After the conquest of Asia Minor, Cyrus shifted his attention from

west to east. From 545 to 539 BCE, he most probably conquered vast areas in Central Asia. These conquests established the northeastern border of the Persian Empire at the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), which originates from the Tien Shan Mountains in present-day Kyrgyzstan and, after flowing through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, empties into the Aral Sea.

In 539 BCE, Cyrus moved against Babylonia. As Cyrus and his army closed in, the king of Babylon, Nabonidus, fled, and his army disintegrated. A Persian army entered Babylon without a fight. The conquest of Babylon was celebrated by Cyrus on a cylinder with an inscription of 35 lines. This remarkable clay cylinder, which was discovered by the Assyrian-born archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam at the temple of the Babylonian god Marduk in 1879, is one of the most significant artifacts of the ancient world. It recounts the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus and his army, who did not face resistance as they entered one of the most important urban centers of the ancient world. The cylinder describes the deference and respect shown by the Persian monarch toward all the peoples of Babylon and their gods. The vassal kings who paid tribute to the king of Babylon now rushed to the court of Cyrus to swear their allegiance to the Persian monarch.

After the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus also issued a proclamation liberating the Jews from their long captivity and ordering the repair and reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Thus, the Jews, who had been living in captivity in Babylon since the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, were freed and allowed to return to Palestine to build their temple. The support of Cyrus for the Jewish cause brought him praise from the prophet Isaiah, who declared him God's shepherd and the Lord's anointed, a proclamation recorded in Isaiah 44:28–45:1 in the Hebrew scriptures. After the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus returned to Central Asia to pacify the Scythian tribes of the region.

According to Herodotus, it was in Central Asia in a battle against a Scythian group known as the Massagetae that Cyrus was killed in 530 BCE. The body of the fallen king was carried back to Pasargadae, located on Dasht-e Morghab (Plain of the Water Bird) near the present-day city of Shiraz in southern Iran. Pasargadae, which had been designated by Cyrus as the capital of his empire, contained numerous buildings, including palaces, pavilions, gardens, and parks. According to Arrian, the mausoleum of Cyrus stood in the midst of a park surrounded by a grove and rich meadows of grass. Today, however, the only structure that reminds us of the power and glory of the first Persian capital is the simple but majestic tomb of Cyrus.

After the death of Cyrus, his oldest son and successor, Cambyses (r. 530–522 BCE), continued with his father's territorial expansions.

Persian forces attacked and captured Egypt in 525 BCE. While Cambyses was in Egypt a revolt erupted against him in Persia, forcing the Persian king to return home. Cambyses, however, died on his journey back to Persia. The death of Cambyses allowed a pretender to the throne who claimed to be Bardiya, the king's brother, to proclaim himself the king. The pretender became quickly popular among the masses after he proclaimed "a three years' remission of taxes and military service" to all peoples and communities within the empire (Herodotus: 3.67). The policy of the new ruler was probably "directed toward the abolition of the privileges of the Persian hereditary nobility and of its predominant position in the economy and society" (Dandamaev and Lukonin: 91). It was at this critical juncture that a group of Persian officers staged a coup and seized the reins of power. They denounced the man who had led the anti-Cambyses revolt as an imposter and marched to Media, where they killed him. The officers then selected from among themselves Darius, a distant relative of Cyrus and Cambyses and an officer in the Persian army, as the new ruler of the Persian Empire. Mass uprisings erupted throughout the empire, and Darius was forced to send his armies to suppress them. In his long inscription at Bisotun near Kermanshah in western Iran, Darius listed the names of the provinces and rebel leaders who had revolted against his authority, and he described how he had defeated each uprising. Once he had restored order, Darius embarked on establishing a new and more integrated administrative structure, which would bring even the most distant provinces of the empire under the direct authority of the central government.

During the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), the Persian Achaemenid state reached the zenith of its power and emerged as the largest empire the world had ever seen. It stretched from the Aral Sea in Central Asia to Libya in North Africa and from the Indus River Valley in the Indian subcontinent to the shores of the Danube in Southeastern Europe. According to Herodotus, Darius I divided his empire into 20 provinces, each ruled by a governor, or satrap. The satraps were responsible for collecting taxes and maintaining security and order in their provinces.

The Achaemenid Empire was based on an agrarian economy. The Persian kings promoted agricultural production and the expansion of cultivable lands by introducing an elaborate irrigation system. Recognizing the importance of communication in ruling and controlling a vast empire, Darius reorganized, rebuilt, and expanded an ancient highway, which came to be known as the Royal Road. A major thoroughfare of 1,500 miles (over 2,400 kilometers), the Royal Road connected the Achaemenid winter capital, the city of Susa in southwestern Iran, to Sardis, the former capital of Lydia, thereby

establishing for the first time a direct and unhindered link between the cultures and economies of Central and Southwest Asia and those of Asia Minor, mainland Greece, and Southeastern Europe. Rest stations as well as "excellent caravanserais" were built along the length of the road (Herodotus: 5.51). Messengers used the Royal Road to relay news and information from various provinces of the empire to the capital: "Nothing mortal travels so fast as these Persian messengers. The entire plan is a Persian invention; and this is the method of it. Along the whole line of road there are men (they say) stationed with horses, in number equal to the number of days which the journey takes, allowing a man and horse to each day; and these men will not be hindered from accomplishing at their best speed the distance which they have to go, either by snow, or rain, or heat, or by darkness of night" (Herodotus: 8.98). The road also facilitated the movement of Persian armies while at the same time serving to promote trade and commerce in the empire. Indeed, one of the strategic objectives of the Achaemenid state was to convert the newly created empire into a vast and integrated free trade zone. The ships and overland caravans that traveled across a vast region extending from China and India to the Balkans and North Africa were filled with glass from Egypt; spices from India; gold from present-day Afghanistan; silver from Asia Minor; lapis lazuli, carnelian, and turquoise from Central Asia; dyes and textiles from Lebanon; ivory from Ethiopia; perfumes from Arabia; timber from Crete; and numerous other commodities. Food products such as grain, wine, oil, dried fish, and honey were shipped far and wide. Darius completed the process of linking the empire by building the first Suez Canal. Thousands of workers from the four corners of the empire were assembled to construct a channel connecting the Gulf of Suez to an arm of the Nile River. Thus, "the whole empire from India to the Aegean was … linked by sea as well as by land" (Cawkwell: 33). To establish an integrated system of trade and taxation, Darius also introduced a standardized coinage. The growth of international commerce initiated unprecedented economic prosperity and a sharp increase in the revenue of the central government.

As practitioners of the most advanced engineering and architecture of their time, the Achaemenid kings built magnificent cities with palaces, pavilions, gardens, and parks. As already mentioned, the city of Pasargadae was built by Cyrus the Great as his capital. Darius moved the capital to Susa for winter and Hagmatana or Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) for summer. He also began the construction of Persepolis as a ceremonial capital near Pasargadae on the plains of Morghab, north of present-day Shiraz in southern Iran. Central to Iranian cities were the private gardens, or *pairidaeza,* watered by

aqueducts, the earliest known instance of gravity-fed water rills and basins arranged in a geometric system. The centrality of these paradises (gardens) in Iranian life was well known even to the Greeks, who observed Persian power with awe, envy, and admiration. Xenophon described how the Persian kings and princes designed numerous paradises, as they called them, full of all the good and beautiful things that the soil produced, and in these gardens the royals spent most of their time except when the season precluded it.

Toward the end of his reign, Darius became involved in a campaign against Greece. The conflict began when the Ionians of Asia Minor rose in rebellion and with support from Athens and Eretria seized Sardis, the former capital of Lydia. The rebellion was suppressed in 493 BCE, but Darius decided to punish the Greek states for their interference in the internal affairs of his empire. In 492 BCE a Persian army seized Thrace and Macedonia, but the mission was aborted a short time later as a result of bad weather and clashes with local tribes. In 490 BCE, the Persians crossed the Aegean Sea and captured Cyclades and Eretria on the island of Euboea. After they had landed on the Greek mainland, however, they suffered a defeat at the hands of the Athenians in the Battle of Marathon. Though they were forced to retreat to their ships, the Persians proceeded with their attack on Athens but were forced to withdraw when they realized that the city and its residents had organized their defenses. Darius planned to complete the conquest of Greece, but before embarking on this campaign he died in 486 BCE.

Darius's son and successor, Xerxes, also organized a campaign against Greece, which was immortalized in flowery language by Herodotus. Encouraged by the prowar Athenian exiles at his court, Xerxes invaded mainland Greece in 480 BCE. After crossing the Hellespont (the Dardanelles), the Persian army seized Thessaly, Macedonia, and northern Greece. Athens was divided between those who advocated negotiations with the Persian king and those who favored a confrontation. The prowar party triumphed and formed a league under the leadership of Sparta, which tried to halt the Persian advance at a mountain pass called Thermopylae. The Persians defeated the small Spartan force, which had fought them courageously, and then advanced on Athens and seized it with little resistance. The confrontation between the Persian army and a small band of Athenian fighters, however, resulted in the burning and destruction of temples and homes on the Acropolis by the Persians. The next confrontation between the Persians and the Greeks took place at Salamis, where the Greek fleet destroyed the Persian naval forces.

Xerxes did not remain in Greece. He returned to Asia and left an

army under the command of one of his generals, Mardonius, in Greece. In 479 BCE, a year after Xerxes had departed mainland Greece, the Persians were back on the offensive, attacking Attica, a region that included Athens. The Greeks finally managed to organize an army, which fought the Persians on the Plain of Plataea. Mardonius made the fatal mistake of participating in the fighting. The Persian commander was killed on the battlefield, and his army was forced to accept defeat and withdraw. The Greeks scored another impressive victory against a Persian force under the command of Tigranes near Mount Mycale on the coast of Asia Minor.

In their accounts, Greek authors and dramatists celebrated the courage and self-sacrifice of the Spartans at Thermopylae and the victory at Salamis as momentous events in their history. Many in the West who insist that "the story of the Persian Wars should serve as the founding myth of European civilization; as the archetype of the triumph of freedom over slavery, and of rugged civic virtue over enervated despotism," have also celebrated the Persian defeat as a rare, singular, and extraordinary event and a critical turning point in the history of Western civilization (Holland: xvi). The defeats in Greece were not the only military setbacks suffered by the Persian Achaemenid armies. Cyrus the Great was repeatedly defeated by the Medes before he triumphed over the Median monarch Astyages. His army was also defeated and humiliated by the Massagetae of Central Asia, who killed the founder of the Persian Empire on the battlefield. The loss at the hands of the Massagetae and the death of the Persian monarch on the battlefield dwarfed the defeats at Marathon and Salamis. For a superpower such as the Achaemenid Empire, military setbacks such as the ones in Greece were probably viewed as a natural and inevitable consequence of wars of expansion, which every empire had to confront as it tried to expand its power and influence. The defeats in Greece were most probably not "of great importance for the Persians: their army was practically intact, the conquered districts remained in their hands, and the enemy forces opposed to them were insignificant in number" (Ghirshman: 192).

The decline of the Achaemenid Empire began during the reigns of Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE) and his successor Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE), who lost Egypt to a rebellion. As the power of provincial governors increased, the authority and prestige of the central government waned. During the reign of Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BCE) the Persians restored the power of the central government and even reconquered Egypt, but at the height of his success the Persian king and all but one of his sons were assassinated by a close confidant, Bagoas, who cherished the dream of ruling the empire through a puppet. In this case the puppet was to be Arses (r. 338–336 BCE), the

remaining son of Artaxerxes III, whose life had been spared so he could play the role of the nominal ruler while Bagoas emerged as the true power behind the throne. Having become aware of the heinous crimes of Bagoas against his father and brothers, Arses tried to punish the traitor, but he and his sons were also murdered. The Achaemenid royal house was decimated by these assassinations. In fact, only one prince of the ruling dynasty could still claim a direct and legitimate link to the Achaemenid male line. This ill-fated prince was a distant relative of Artaxerxes III who at the time served as the governor of Armenia and would ascend the throne as Darius III (r. 336–330 BCE). To consolidate power in his own hands, Darius eliminated Bagoas, but the new king never enjoyed the opportunity to reorganize the significantly weakened empire that he had inherited.

In 330 BCE, the fragile and crumbling Achaemenid state collapsed after it was attacked by Alexander the Macedon, who defeated Darius III and his armies in 333 and 331 BCE. Alexander seized Susa, Persepolis, Pasargadae, and Ecbatana. Darius, who was fleeing east to reorganize his forces in Bactria and Sogdiana, was killed by his commanders in 330 BCE. The death of Darius III signaled the end of the Achaemenid dynasty. Alexander seized the provinces of the Persian Empire and marched to Central Asia and then to India before returning to Mesopotamia and dying in Babylon in 323 BCE.

The short-lived empire of Alexander quickly disintegrated as his generals began to fight over the imperial spoils. Between 312 and 301 BCE, Mesopotamia, much of Asia Minor, and present-day Iran, Afghanistan, and the southern regions of Central Asia came under the rule of one of Alexander's generals, Seleucus, who founded the Seleucid state. For much of its history, the Seleucid dynasty ruled from its capital, the city of Antioch in Syria. The incessant military campaigns against the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt exhausted the Seleucid treasury and diverted the attention of its rulers from the eastern provinces of their empire. The capital of the Seleucid kings, Antioch, was situated on the western frontiers of the empire and a long way away from Iran and Central Asia. The great distance between the Seleucid capital and its eastern provinces allowed the region's provincial governors and invading nomadic groups from Central Asia to establish themselves as independent kings.

Sometime between 247 and 238 BCE, Diodotus, the Seleucid governor of Bactria, broke away from the Seleucids and established his own independent kingdom in present-day northern Afghanistan. Soon another governor, Andragoras of Parthia, proclaimed his independence. Meanwhile, a branch of the Parni or Aparni, an Iranian Scythian group from Central Asia under the charismatic leadership of Arsaces (Arshak), began to push into Parthia and Hyrcania. In 238

BCE Arsaces attacked Parthia, defeating and killing Andragoras in battle. After this victory, Arsaces established himself as the master of Parthia. Because Parthia was identified as the birthplace of the newly founded kingdom, the Greek and Romans referred to Arsaces and his successors as Parthians, or those who hail from Parthia. Indeed, Parthia served as a territorial base from which the dynasty of the Arsaces, also known as the Arsacids, expanded, eventually creating a vast and formidable empire.

The Seleucids made repeated attempts to reimpose their authority over Greater Iran, particularly during the reigns of Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE) and Antiochus III (r. 223–187 BCE). Since the inception of the Seleucid state, Media Atropatene (present-day Azerbaijan), in present-day northwestern Iran, and Chorasmia, on the lower reaches of the Oxus River south of the Aral Sea, had remained independent under their own rulers. The Seleucids had also failed to capture the Indus River basin, which was ceded to Chandragupta, the founder of the powerful Maurya dynasty based in northern India.

Though the Seleucids managed to reassert their nominal control over most of their eastern provinces, these efforts failed to establish a stable and centralized empire under the direct control of Antioch. The Seleucid state in the east remained a collection of autonomous kingdoms, which paid tribute to their Macedonian overlord but for all practical purposes functioned independently. In 190 BCE, the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III was defeated by the Romans and their allies in the Battle of Magnesia in western Asia Minor. The Roman Republic forced the Seleucid monarch to sign the humiliating Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE. According to this peace treaty, Antiochus renounced his claims to all territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send a group of hostages, including his son, the future Antiochus IV, to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity to the Romans; and surrender his fleet and elephants. With the defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. The defeat at Magnesia undermined the credibility of the Seleucids and convinced the pretenders to power in the east, particularly the newly emerging Arsacid dynasty based in northeastern Iran and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in northern Afghanistan, to resume their campaigns of territorial expansion. The rise of a new Iranian royal house in the east, namely the Arsacids, corresponded with the growing decline of the Seleucid state in the west.

The origins of the Arsacid dynasty and the events that led to the rise of Arsaces I, the founder of the Parthian state, are shrouded in mystery. The absence of reliable Parthian sources has forced historians of ancient Iran to rely almost exclusively on Greek and Roman

sources, who were resolute and unyielding in their hostility and disdain toward the Arsacids, portraying them as "treacherous, bellicose and arrogant barbarians with curious and distasteful customs" (Colledge: 13). The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus claimed that Arsaces I was "a man of low birth" who had been a "brigand chief during his younger days, but since his ideals gradually changed for the better, by a series of brilliant exploits he rose to greater heights" (Ammianus Marcellinus: 23.6.2). The Greek geographer Strabo stated that Arsaces was a Scythian or a Bactrian chief who emerged as the leader of the Parni or Aparni, a group within the Dahae tribal confederation. In his account of Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia, the historian Arrian mentions the Dahae or Daae as a people living in close proximity to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in Central Asia. Sometime during the closing years of the fourth century or the earlier part of the third century BCE, the Parni moved southward from Central Asia and occupied the regions on the eastern and southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea. A short time later, Arsaces I was crowned as king.

The conquest of Parthia by Arsaces I alarmed the Seleucid ruler, Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE), who was forced to organize a military campaign to regain his control over eastern Iran. In 231/230 BCE, Seleucus II marched against the Arsacids, but the campaign was inconclusive and failed to neutralize the threat posed by Arsaces I. When the Seleucid army returned home, Arsaces restored his control over northeastern Iran. By the time Arsaces died, his territorial gains had laid the foundation of a strong state. The significance of Arsaces I as the founder of the Parthian state persisted after his death. Out of respect and admiration for his accomplishments, all Arsacid monarchs assumed the title "Arsaces" (Arshak) upon ascending the throne. The Greek author Strabo wrote that it is the custom of the Parthians that all their rulers are called Arsaces, "although personally one king is called Orodes, another Phraates, and another something else" (Strabo: 7:63).

During the reign of Arsaces's successor, Arsaces II (r. 217–191 BCE), the Parthian state was once again attacked by the Seleucid armies, this time under the command of Antiochus III. In 209 BCE, Antiochus III embarked on an eastern campaign to reestablish Seleucid rule over Iran. One of the principal goals of this campaign was to neutralize the threat posed by the newly emerging Arsacid state based in Parthia. Antiochus managed to occupy one of the capitals of the Arsacid dynasty at Shahr-i Qumis (Hecatompylos or Sad Darvazeh, City of a Hundred Gates) near present-day Damghan in northern Iran. The Parthians made a tactical retreat. They acknowledged Seleucid sovereignty and agreed to withdraw from some of their newly

conquered territories. The Arsacid retreat was, however, short-lived. After his return to Syria, Antiochus III became involved in a conflict with Rome. In the Battle of Magnesia near Mount Sipylus in western Asia Minor in late 190 BCE, Antiochus suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Romans and their allies. In the Treaty of Apamea signed in 188 BCE, Antiochus renounced his claims to all territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send a group of hostages, including his own son, the future Antiochus IV, to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity to the Romans; and surrender his fleet and elephants (Appian: 11.8.38–40). With the defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. The humiliation at Magnesia undermined the credibility of the Seleucids and convinced the pretenders to power in the east, particularly the Arsacid dynasty based in Parthia, and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in northern Afghanistan to resume their campaigns of territorial expansion.

Beginning in the reigns of Phraates I (Frahata I), who ruled from 176 to 171 BCE, the Arsacids expanded their territorial possessions. Phraates began the slow process of breaking out of the geographical confines of northeastern Iran, extending the territory of the Parthian state to the regions lying to the south of the Alborz mountain range. Phraates I defeated the Mardi, a tribal group who lived in the eastern regions of the Alborz, and expanded the boundaries of the Arsacid state from northeastern Iran to the lands west of the Caspian Gates. When Phraates I died he was succeeded by his brother, Mithridates I (Mithradata I), who proved to be one of the most capable and dynamic of all Arsacid kings.

During the reign of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), the Arsacid state was transformed from a small kingdom in present-day northeastern Iran into a major empire ruling a vast territory extending from the Oxus River in Central Asia to Mesopotamia in the heart of the ancient Near East. His first major victory was achieved against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. Mithridates I then pushed westward and conquered Media sometime between 148 and 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Babylon, including the city of Seleucia-on-Tigris by 141 BCE. Next, the Parthian armies attacked and defeated the forces of Elymais in present-day southwestern Iran, seizing Susa, which had served for nearly two centuries as the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by attacking Mesopotamia and western Iran. The campaigns of Demetrius II against Mithridates I proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarchy. Demetrius was defeated and captured by the Parthians in 139 BCE.

The humiliated Seleucid king was first paraded in public and then transported to Hyrcania in northeastern Iran, where he was received with kindness by Mithridates I. Mithridates arranged a marriage between his daughter Rhodogune and Demetrius, but Demetrius was determined to return to Syria. He therefore tried twice to escape northeastern Iran and reach Syria, but on both occasions he was captured. Between 139 and 132 BCE, Parthian armies completed their conquest of southwestern Iran and southern Iraq. After a long and successful reign of nearly 44 years, Mithridates I, who had assumed the title "great king," died in either 139 or 138 BCE and was succeeded by his son, Phraates II.

The empire that Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE) inherited from his father was threatened by enemies in the east as well as in the west. In the last months of Mithridates's reign, the northeastern borders of the Parthian Empire had been attacked once again by invading Iranian nomadic groups from Central Asia. These groups, known as the Yüeh-chihs (Yuezhis) in Chinese and as the Tochari by Western writers, were pushed out of Central Asia by the Huns and forced to seek new pasturelands for their animals. A branch of the Tochari would eventually establish the Kushan Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and parts of India. The Kushans moved from Central Asia first to Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan. From Bactria they crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and occupied Gandhara in present-day northwestern Pakistan. The occupation of Gandhara, southeast of the Hindu Kush Mountains, allowed the Kushans to extend their power to the Indus River Valley and the city of Taxila by the middle of the first century CE. From here, the Kushans moved farther south to the region of the Yamuna River in the present-day northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where they chose the city of Mathura as their southern capital, while Parasawara or Purushapura (today's Peshawar) in present-day Pakistan remained their northern capital. Thus, by the beginning of the second century CE the Kushans, along with the Romans, Parthians, and Chinese, were one of the four most powerful states in the world.

While Phraates II was quelling the threat posed by the invading tribes in the east, the new Seleucid ruler Antiochus VII Sidetes (r. 138–129 BCE) attacked Babylonia and Media, defeating Parthian armies in three separate military encounters. In response, Phraates II sent a delegation to negotiate a peace agreement. Antiochus responded that he was willing to cease hostilities and conclude a treaty if the Arsacid monarch would release his brother Demetrius from captivity, withdraw from the provinces he had seized, and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord. Phraates rejected these demands. Instead, he released Demetrius, who had been living in

Hyrcania since his defeat and capture by Mithridates I. As already mentioned, Demetrius had attempted twice to escape Hyrcania and return to Syria, but both times he had been captured and returned to northern Iran. Now with his kingdom under attack, Phraates II allowed the former Seleucid king to return to Syria. The Arsacid monarch hoped that the return of Demetrius to Syria would force Antiochus to call off his campaign and return to Syria to defend his throne against his brother. With winter arriving, Antiochus divided his army and scattered its units in several cities in western Iran. The oppressive behavior and excesses of these army units, who demanded food and supplies, caused the populace to revolt against Antiochus VII. Phraates II used this golden opportunity to place an army in the field. The advisers of Antiochus pleaded with him not to engage in battle against a much larger Arsacid army. The Seleucid monarch, however, dismissed these pleas. When the two armies clashed, the Parthians defeated the Seleucid army and killed Antiochus VII. This decisive victory ended Seleucid rule in Iran. Having scored an impressive victory over the Seleucids, Phraates II intended to advance to Syria. However, his attention was diverted to the east once again by the renewed threat posed by nomadic groups who had overrun the southern regions of Central Asia. Though Phraates II was killed in his encounter with the Saka tribes in 128 BCE, the Parthian state continued to grow and expand under his successors. Among these, Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE) emerged as one of the most dynamic of the Arsacid kings. During his long reign, Mithridates transformed the Parthian Empire into one of the most powerful states in the world.

The reign of Mithridates II witnessed the establishment of Arsacid rule in Babylonia and Characene or Mesene at the mouth of the Persian Gulf (the territory of present-day southern Iraq and Kuwait). The Parthian king then moved against Armenia. He defeated the Armenian monarch Artavasdes I and took his son Tigrenes as a hostage to the Arsacid court. In the east, Mithridates II reimposed Parthian rule over Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan and brought Sistan in present-day eastern Iran under his control.

It was during the reign of Mithridates II that an envoy of the Han dynasty of China arrived in the Arsacid court. The envoy returned to China accompanied by representatives of the Arsacid monarch bearing gifts of ostrich eggs and conjurers. These negotiations were followed by the establishment of the first trading caravans between China and the Parthian Empire. Mithridates II also sent ambassadors to Rome to expand and augment this intercontinental trade route. The numerous trade routes, which came to be known as the Silk Road in the 19th century, created a direct commercial link between China, Central Asia,

Iran, and Rome and heralded the exchange of goods, ideas, and technology between East Asia, Central Asia, the Near East, and Europe. Direct economic ties with China allowed plants, spices, foodstuffs, medicine, and musical instruments as well as new ideas and religious beliefs from India and Iran to travel eastward. Among the precious spices from Iran introduced to China by way of the Silk Road was saffron, which was used as an aromatic to perfume clothes and hair and to flavor wines. The Chinese, who called the Arsacid dynasty Anxi or Anshi, also borrowed the cultivation of grapes for wine and the growing of alfalfa from the Farghaneh Valley in Central Asia. Farghaneh, which is divided today between the three countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, was also famous for its horses from among which the Chinese imported a particular breed. To the west, the Arsacids established a close trading relationship with Rome, importing various "metals and numerous manufactured articles of high class" and exporting "textile fabrics" such as "silks and carpets" and spices (Rawlinson: 425–426).

The power and prestige of Mithridates II was reflected in his adoption of the title "king of kings" beginning in 109 BCE. In 95 BCE Mithridates installed Tigranes II, who had been raised at the Arsacid court, as the new ruler of Armenia. Shortly afterward Mithridates forced the kingdoms of Adiabene, Gordyene, and Osrhoene to capitulate and accept his suzerainty. He expanded the territory of the Parthian Empire to the banks of the Euphrates in the west, seizing the important city of Dura-Europos in present-day eastern Syria. Having established himself as the eastern neighbor of Rome, Mithridates II sent an envoy to the Roman general Sulla to negotiate an alliance. Through these negotiations the Euphrates was established as the border between the two powers, but soon the relationship between Rome and Parthia began to deteriorate. The conflict between the two powers was mostly centered on control of Armenia and Mesopotamia.

In 53 BCE, the armies of the Roman Republic under the command of Marcus Licinius Crassus invaded northern Mesopotamia. The Arsacid monarch Orodes II (Urud II) (r. 58/57–38 BCE) responded by leading the main Parthian army to Media Atropatene (present-day Azerbaijan). He also ordered one of his generals Surena (Suren) to confront the invading Romans in Mesopotamia. In June 53 BCE in the Battle of Carrhae (present-day Harran in southeastern Turkey), Surena inflicted a crushing defeat on Roman forces. Crassus and his son were killed, and a large number of Roman officers and soldiers were captured. The Roman battle standards were seized by Suren, and they were only returned to Rome after long negotiations during the reign of Emperor Augustus.

Despite its defeat at Carrhae, Rome did not abandon its aggressive

policies toward the Parthians. In 40 BCE another Roman commander, Decidius Saxa, was captured and killed by the Arsacids. Once again in 36 BCE the Roman general Mark Antony invaded Parthian territory, seizing Armenia and using it as a territorial base to invade Media. The Arsacid king Phraates IV (r. 37–2 BCE), however, counterattacked and forced Antony to withdraw his legions after suffering heavy casualties and losing some of his standards. The victory over the Roman general allowed the Arsacid monarch to overrun Armenia in 32–31 BCE and install a pro-Arsacid prince on its throne.

The conflict between Rome and Parthia continued because the honor and prestige of Rome required that it not accept defeat. Furthermore, the Romans were concerned about the security of Syria, which could be attacked and captured by the Parthians if they felt a weakening of Rome's resolve and the absence of its armies in Mesopotamia. Recognizing the heavy cost and the high risks of an eastern campaign, the Roman emperor Augustus opted for a peace treaty with the Parthians. The Arsacid monarch Phraates IV agreed to recognize Rome's protectorate over Armenia and return the legionary standards, which the Parthians had captured from the Roman armies. In his attempt to convince Phraates IV to return the Roman standards, Augustus sent a slave girl named Musa as a gift to Phraates. Soon Musa emerged as the queen of Phraates IV. She used her influence over Phraates to convince the Arsacid king to send his four sons as hostages to Rome and designate her son Phraates (the future Phraates V) as heir to the throne. In 2 BCE, Musa poisoned Phraates IV and placed herself and her own son Phraates as joint rulers on the Arsacid throne. The remarkable rise of Musa to power demonstrates what a truly "determined woman could achieve" (Colledge: 60).

Armenia continued to be one of the principal bones of contention between the Parthian and Roman Empires. When the Roman emperor Augustus sent his adopted son Gaius Caesar at the head of an army to invade Mesopotamia and Armenia, Phraates V sent an envoy to demand the return of his brothers, who had been sent to Rome by his father, Phraates IV, as part of a peace agreement. Augustus responded by sending him an insulting letter in which he addressed the Arsacid monarch as simply "Phraates." The Roman emperor demanded that Phraates "lay aside the royal name and … withdraw from Armenia." Far from being intimidated, Phraates V wrote back "in a generally haughty tone, styling himself 'King of Kings' and addressing Augustus simply as 'Caesar'" (Cassius Dio: 415). In the end Phraates agreed to a peace agreement, which was concluded in 1 CE. Armenia was declared a Roman protectorate. Shortly after signing the peace treaty with Rome, Phraates and his mother, Musa, were overthrown.

In the second century CE, the Parthian state began to decline.

Internal warfare between contenders to the throne weakened and undermined the power and authority of the ruling Arsacid monarchs. The growing weakness of the Parthian state encouraged the Romans to adopt a more aggressive and expansionist policy. In 113/114 CE, the Roman emperor Trajan embarked on a campaign against the Parthians, seizing Armenia and annexing it to the Roman Empire. He then invaded northern Mesopotamia, crossed the Euphrates in 116, and captured the kingdom of Adiabene, centered in present-day northern Iraq, which was converted into the Roman province of Assyria. The road to the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon was now open. The Arsacid monarch Osroes, who had to quell challenges from within his own dynasty, could not even raise an army to defend his capital. Thus, after a short skirmish Ctesiphon fell, and the Arsacid king's golden throne was captured by Trajan. From Ctesiphon, the Roman emperor marched to the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Despite these military setbacks, the Arsacid dynasty survived. The Romans could not retain all of their territorial gains, and after the death of Trajan in 117, his successor, Hadrian, returned some of the newly conquered provinces to their kings.

Once again in 163, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the Romans responded to the Parthian seizure of Armenia and their incursion into Syria by invading the region. First, they seized Armenia and deposed the ruler who had been installed on the Armenian throne by the Arsacid monarch Vologeses IV (r. 147/148–191/192). They then attacked Mesopotamia and seized the Parthian capital, Ctesiphon. The palace of Vologeses was destroyed, and the city was looted and ravaged by the Roman invaders. And yet at the very moment when the Romans could claim total victory over their proud and stubborn foe, a plague swept through and devastated the ranks of Roman legions, who began to die in large numbers. The ailing and dying Roman survivors carried the terrible disease with them back to Rome. Thus, Roman territorial gains proved once again to be short-lived, and the Arsacid dynasty managed to regain much of its lost territorial possessions. The Arsacids felt sufficiently confident to support revolts against Rome in Adiabene and Osroene during the reign of Vologeses V (r. 191/192–207/208 CE). The Romans under the leadership of Emperor Septimius Severus responded by attacking the region and reimposing Roman rule over the rebellious territories. Once the Roman emperor had returned to Europe, Vologeses V counterattacked and swept through Mesopotamia, imposing Arsacid authority over Adiabene in present-day northern Iraq. In response to the Parthian campaign, Septimius Severus invaded Mesopotamia again, this time marching all the way to Ctesiphon, capturing the Arsacid capital. The heavy casualties they had suffered and the

shortage of food, however, forced the Romans to withdraw once again. When the main Roman armies had departed, the Parthians reoccupied the territories they had lost.

The frequent dynastic battles among Arsacid contenders and the incessant wars with Rome exhausted the Parthian Empire and undermined its legitimacy. At times, the competition over the control of the throne resulted in the emergence of several Arsacid kings ruling different regions of the empire at the same time. The Parthian state did not, however, collapse as a result of internal warfare and Roman invasions. In 224 CE Ardashir, the governor of the district of Istakhr in the province of Fars who was a vassal of the Arsacid dynasty, defeated Artabanus IV (Ardavan IV) in the Battle of Hormozdgan. With the death of Artabanus IV on the battlefield, the Arsacid dynasty came to a sudden end. From the ashes of the Parthian state, a new empire emerged under the leadership of Ardashir, the son of Papak (Pabag) and a descendant of Sasan. Thus, the new dynasty would be called the Sasanians. The Sasanians rejuvenated Iranian power, expanding the eastern boundaries of their empire to present-day Afghanistan and Central Asia and its western frontiers to Syria and southern Asia Minor.

During their long reign, the Arsacids had granted a high level of religious freedom and tolerated cultural diversity among their subjects. They also had rejected a centralized political system, opting instead for a highly decentralized administrative structure that allowed local dynasts to rule as autonomous kings as long as they accepted the suzerainty of the Arsacid king and did not mint their own coins. The Parthian political and military power structure was based on an alliance between the Arsacid ruling dynasty and a number of large landowning families, which constituted the highest echelon of the Parthian nobility. The heads of these families ruled their home regions as local kings. Thus, for example, the Suren family was centered in Sistan in eastern Iran, while the Karen family was based in Nahavand in western Iran. The landholdings of these families were not, however, confined to their home base, and some of their prominent members owned large estates in different parts of Greater Iran. The head of each powerful family had his own armies, courts, harems, entourages, attendants, and servants. When Surena, the powerful head of the Suren family, “travelled privately, he had one thousand camels to carry his baggage, two hundred chariots for his concubines, one thousand completely armed men for lifeguards, and a great many more light-armed; and he had at least ten thousand horsemen altogether, of his servants and retinue” (Plutarch: 1:182). These families played an important role in the selection of a new Arsacid monarch. According to Strabo, the Arsacid kings were

appointed by two councils, “one that of kinsmen and the other that of wise men and Magi” (Strabo: 11.9.3). Plutarch wrote that at the coronation of the Arsacid kings, the honor of placing the crown upon the head of a new monarch belonged to the head of the Suren family (Plutarch: 1:182).

Unlike the Arsacids, who had displayed a highly tolerant attitude toward the different religious communities in their domains, the Sasanians introduced Zoroastrianism as the state religion of their empire. Sasanian monarchs such as Shapur I, Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II empowered the Zoroastrian priesthood to spread the teachings of their religion and suppress non-Zoroastrian communities. As the influence of the Zoroastrian high priests over the Sasanian dynasty increased, the level of intolerance vis-à-vis non-Zoroastrian communities intensified. The Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, who rose to prominence during this period, boasted of his suppression of the Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist communities. The Iranian prophet Mani was also questioned and imprisoned. His followers, known as Manicheans, were censored and forced into exile.

The Sasanians created a highly centralized political system. While the Persian king of kings ruled from his capital, Ctesiphon, the princes of the royal family were appointed as governors of important provinces of the empire. Thus, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, appointed his son Hormozd Ardashir as the ruler of Armenia, his son Narseh as the ruler of Sistan and later Armenia, his son Shapur as the king of Maishan or Mesene (Characene) in present-day Kuwait and southern Iraq, and his son Bahram as the king of Gilan on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. The Sasanians also established a much larger central government. The king of kings appointed a grand vizier, or chief minister (*wuzurg farmadar*), who was responsible for supervising a large army of ministers, scribes, secretaries, astrologers, and physicians. These officials attended to the daily needs of the royal administration. The king of kings also appointed the commander of the army and all of the margraves (*marzbans*), who were responsible for maintaining the security and defense of the empire’s border provinces. The size of the Sasanian central government grew significantly during the reign of Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE), who reorganized the army and the royal administration. The post of the supreme commander in chief (*eran espahbad* or *arteshtaran salar*) was abolished and replaced by four commanders (*spahbads*) responsible for the security of the eastern, western, northern, and southern regions of the empire. Each commander reported directly to the Sasanian king. Khosrow also appointed margraves, who also received their orders directly from the Sasanian monarch.

Under the Sasanians the conflict between Rome and Iran was

renewed and intensified, but this time it was the Persians who assumed a more offensive stance. The son and successor of Ardashir I, Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), fought three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. Valerian was captured by Shapur and died in captivity in Iran. The Romans had their greatest success against one of Shapur's sons and successors, Narseh (r. 293–302), inflicting a humiliating defeat on Persian forces, capturing the royal harem, and imposing a peace treaty that pushed the boundary between the two empires eastward from the Euphrates River to the Tigris River. It is not surprising therefore that a significant portion of the reign of Shapur II (r. 309–379), a grandson of Narseh, was spent on rescinding the embarrassing treaty. As the longest-reigning Sasanian monarch, Shapur II fought the Romans in several major campaigns and managed to restore the Euphrates as the boundary between the Roman and Sasanian states.

But, the threat to the security of the Sasanian Empire was not limited to Roman invasions and incursions in Armenia and Mesopotamia. Starting in the reign of Shapur II, nomadic groups from Central Asia began to breach the northeastern frontiers of the Sasanian state. Though Shapur II managed to quell this threat and form an alliance with the invading Chionites, his successors were forced to spend much of their reigns in defending the eastern borders of their empire. Throughout the fifth century CE, the Sasanian state was repeatedly attacked by the Kidarites and Hephthalites who were pushing south from Central Asia. Several Sasanian kings—Yazdegerd I (r. 399–421 CE), Bahram V Gor (r. 421–439 CE), and Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457)—spent a significant part of their reigns in defending and protecting the northeastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire from the Hephthalites. During the reign of Peroz (r. 459–484 CE), which began with a long drought, the Sasanian armies were repeatedly defeated by the Hephthalites. In the last battle between the two sides Peroz was killed, and the Sasanians had no other choice but to sue for peace and accept a humiliating treaty, which forced them to pay an annual tribute to the Hephthalites.

The defeat of the Sasanian dynasty at the hands of the Hephthalites, the continuing wars with the Romans, the heavy taxes imposed on the empire's subjects, and the growing suffering and exploitation of peasant masses resulted in the emergence of a social movement that demanded fundamental reforms and severe restrictions on the powers and privileges of the empire's ruling classes. The situation worsened to the point that even the Sasanian monarch Kavad I (r. 484–496 and 498/499–531 CE) and some members of the royal family began to advocate for institutional reforms and the curtailment of the enormous power of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian

priesthood. It is not surprising therefore that Kavad I was attracted to the teachings of Mazdak, a member of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy who preached against greed, arrogance, and unfettered power.

Mazdak was a follower of a reform movement within Zoroastrianism that preached peace and justice and opposed violence and bloodshed. As a Zoroastrian leader and preacher, Mazdak believed in the constant struggle between the forces of good and evil. According to his interpretation of Zoroastrianism, the triumph of good over evil required the human soul to strive for compassion, brotherhood, and equality and to refrain from wickedness, malice, competition, and conflict, as represented by greed and the drive to accumulate property and women. According to Mazdak, the source of evil and suffering in the world was the human fixation with satisfying self-centered desires without any regard for the hardships and needs of fellow human beings. To liberate the human soul from the forces of evil and to create a just and peaceful society free of competition and violence, human beings had to abandon greed and selfishness and share the resources of their society, including private property and women.

Mazdak's ideas and Kavad's support for them posed a direct threat to the established privileges of the empire's ruling classes, particularly the nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. This opposition was sufficiently powerful to depose Kavad in 496 CE and force him to seek refuge with the Hephthalites who had defeated and killed his father, Peroz. In 498/499, Kavad managed to convince the Hephthalites to assist him with raising an army and regaining his throne. Kavad returned to power, but he realized that his authority would not be fully secure unless he appeased the anti-Mazdak nobility and priests. The ruling dynasty was itself divided from within among the pro-Mazdak and anti-Mazdak factions. Among the contenders to the throne, Mazdak and his followers favored the older son of Kavad I, Kavus, who sympathized with the ideas and objectives of their movement. The younger son, Khosrow, a fervent opponent of Mazdak, was the preferred candidate of the anti-Mazdak nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. To appease the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood, Kavad appointed Khosrow as his crown prince.

When Kavad I died, he was succeeded on the throne by his son Khosrow I (r. 531–579 CE). Khosrow unleashed a campaign of terror against Mazdak and his followers. The religious leader was denounced, detained, and executed, and the movement was forced underground. The murder of Mazdak, who had gained popularity among the masses, was followed by a campaign of repression.

Thousands of Mazdakites were imprisoned, and many were executed. The movement was forced underground, but it did not die. Despite the harsh repression it suffered at the hands of the Sasanian state, the Mazdakite movement survived and enjoyed a revival after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the introduction of Islam in 651.

Though he suppressed the Mazdakites, Khosrow recognized that repression alone could not save and prolong the life of the Sasanian monarchy. He therefore introduced a series of governmental reforms. These included the completion and implementation of tax reforms that already had been introduced by his father, Kavad, to alleviate the financial burdens imposed on the peasantry. Khosrow's reforms were intended to expand the size of the Sasanian bureaucracy and strengthen the position of the Sasanian king of kings vis-à-vis the Persian nobility and the provincial power centers. The first and perhaps most important of these reforms was restructuring the archaic tax system of the empire. In the traditional system, taxes were levied on the yield of land. Therefore, from year to year the amount of the tax varied. Khosrow abolished the system based on yearly variation and replaced it with a fixed sum. The Sasanian king also reorganized the administrative structure of his empire. He established a governmental system based on a council of ministers, or divan, headed by a prime minister. For much of his reign, the wise and capable chief minister, Bozorg Mihr, played a central role in running a well-oiled and highly efficient bureaucracy for his royal master. Khosrow also empowered the lower gentry or the *dihgans* and reduced the power of the great feudal families who enjoyed enormous influence in the royal court.

Despite Khosrow's best efforts, the internal decline continued. The long military campaigns during the reigns of Khosrow I and his grandson, Khosrow II Parvez (r. 590–628 CE), against the Roman Empire exhausted the financial resources of the Sasanian state. Khosrow II embarked on an ambitious campaign against the Byzantine Empire. In 613, Persian armies captured Syria and Palestine. There they seized the True Cross of Christian tradition and transported it back to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. To the north, the Sasanian forces moved west from Cappadocia in central Asia Minor and quickly reached the Asian shores of the Bosporus in 614. The capital of the Byzantine Empire was now within their sight. Since the time of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, no Iranian ruler had extended the borders of his empire so far westward. At this point, a Byzantine embassy arrived in the Persian court and pleaded for peace. The new Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, likewise arrived in the Persian camp with a plea for negotiations. Khosrow II, however, rejected a peace settlement. In 619, Khosrow's armies invaded and occupied Egypt.

Territorially overextended, financially exhausted, and militarily overstretched, the Sasanian armies disintegrated when the Byzantine state organized a counterattack. The aging and increasingly inflexible and obstinate Khosrow II refused to recognize the gravity of the situation. Instead of assuming responsibility for his own poor decisions, he blamed his army commanders for the defeats he had suffered and ordered their execution. This only exasperated the crisis and resulted in a revolt by his commanders, who opened direct negotiations with Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor. The conflict between the Persian monarch and his opponents was finally resolved when a group of conspirators, including one of the king's sons, Shiruya (Shiroy), staged a coup. Shiruya ascended the Sasanian throne as Kavad II. The new monarch first imprisoned and then executed his father and all of his brothers. The Sasanian state never recovered from this murderous rampage. The death of Shiruya a few months after he had seized the throne left a vacuum that could not be filled by the young and inexperienced princes and princesses of the royal family, including two daughters of Khosrow II, Boran (Puran) (r. 630–631) and Azarmidokht (r. 631 CE), who ascended the throne one after another in quick succession. In the anarchy that followed the death of Shiruya, the authority of the Sasanian central government began to disintegrate rapidly. Army commanders acted as independent rulers, and at least one, Shahrbaraz, seized the throne for several months, declaring himself the king of kings before being murdered. Finally, in 633 the members of the Persian nobility agreed to install a grandson of Khosrow II as the new monarch. The new king, Yazdegerd III (r. 633–651), was just eight years old when he ascended the throne. He had no real power and could not restore order to the empire. Thus, when the Muslim Arabs invaded in 636 CE, a Persian army was defeated at Qadisiyyah in present-day Iraq. Yazdegerd tried desperately to rally his forces, but the Sasanian army suffered another humiliating defeat at the hands of the invading Arabs at Nahavand (Nihavand) in western Iran in 642. The ill-fated Persian monarch had no other alternative but to flee. He first traveled from Media to Ray, south of present-day Tehran, and then to Isfahan. From Isfahan, Yazdegerd set out for Istakhr in southern Iran, but when the province of Fars was invaded by an Arab army, Yazdegerd fled to Kerman in southeastern Iran. From Kerman, he went to Sistan in eastern Iran but could not stay there either. In his last desperate attempt to save his life and rescue the Sasanian state, Yazdegerd III fled to northeastern Iran. He was most probably trying to reach Central Asia and China and seek support from the Turks and the Tang emperor of China to whom he had sent his son, Peroz, with pleas for assistance. In 651 near the city of Marv in the northeastern Iranian province of

Khorasan, Yazdegerd III was murdered by a miller with whom he had sought sanctuary. The miller apparently found the jewels, which the royal fugitive carried with him, too irresistible. The death of the last Sasanian king and the disintegration of the Persian armies allowed the Muslim Arabs to complete their conquest of Iran with relative ease.

With the collapse of the Sasanian state the history of ancient Iran came to an abrupt conclusion, and a new era in the long and rich history of Iran commenced, this time within the framework of the Islamic civilization. The Arabs who overthrew the Sasanian dynasty introduced a new religion, Islam, that was eventually adopted by the majority of the Iranian people. Despite the fall of the Sasanian state and the eventual conversion of the majority of the population to Islam, however, Iranians preserved their unique historical, cultural, and linguistic identity. They also continued to observe many of their ancient cultural practices. Thus, Greater Iran did not become Arabized or Arabic-speaking, though Iranians played a central and leading role in the growth, maturation, and advancement of Islamic civilization.

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Chronology of Ancient Iran

5500 BCE The earliest settlements are established in Sialk near Kashan, central Iran.

2700 BCE The Elamite Kingdom is established, with Susa in southwestern Iran as its capital.

1350 BCE A mass migration of Iranian groups from Central Asia and present-day northern Afghanistan to the Iranian plateau occurs.

1244–1208 BCE Wars break out between the Elamite Kingdom and Assyria.

1000 BCE According to some scholars of ancient Iran, the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) is born. (There is no consensus on the date of Zarathustra's birth. Some have argued that he was born in 1200 BCE, while others have opted for 600 BCE.)

835 BCE The Iranian Medes are mentioned for the first time on an inscription of the Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser III.

700–550/549 BCE: Median Empire

700 BCE This year represents the height of Assyrian power.

700–675 BCE Deioces rules. Other sources maintain that he ruled from 700 to 647 BCE.

675–653 BCE Phraortes (Haravartish) rules. Other sources maintain that he ruled from 647 to 625 BCE.

669–627 BCE Ashurbanipal rules the Assyrian Empire.

653–625 BCE Scythians overrun Media.

639 BCE Ashurbanipal of Assyria attacks and defeats the Elamite Kingdom and sacks its capital, Susa.

627 BCE Ashurbanipal dies.

626 BCE Fighting breaks out between rival contenders to the Assyrian throne after the death of Ashurbanipal.

The Chaldaean commander Nabopolassar seizes the Babylonian throne.

625–624–585 BCE Cyaxares (Uvakhshtra) rules.

624 BCE The Medes defeat the Scythians.

615 BCE The Medes join Babylonia in a united front against Assyria.

The Medes capture Arrapha near present-day Kirkuk in northern Iraq.

614 BCE The Medes capture Ashur, the first capital of the Assyrian state.

The Medes conclude a treaty of peace with the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

612 BCE The Medes and Babylonians sack Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

Ashuruballit proclaims himself king of Assyria at Harran.

610 BCE The Medes and Babylonians attack Harran.

605 BCE The Assyrian kingdom ends.

590–585 BCE The Median-Lydia Wars take place.

587 BCE Jerusalem is seized by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who burns Jerusalem and its Temple.

585 BCE Peace is established between Media and Lydia.

585/584–556 BCE Astyages (Rishtivega) becomes the king of Media.

584 BCE King Cyaxares of Media dies.

561 BCE Croesus becomes the ruler of Lydia.

559/558 BCE Cyrus II becomes the king of Anshan (present-day southern Iranian province of Fars).

553/552–550/549 BCE Cyrus revolts against the Median king Astyages.

550 BCE Cyrus defeats Astyages and captures Ecbatana (Hagmatana). Persia and Media are unified.

550–330 BCE: Achaemenid Empire

559/558–530 BCE Cyrus (Kurush) the Great rules.

547/546 BCE Cyrus defeats Croesus, the king of Lydia, and captures the Lydian capital, Sardis. Asia Minor becomes part of Cyrus's empire.

545–540 BCE Cyrus is in Central Asia.

539 BCE Cyrus captures Babylon, liberates the Jews, and allows them to return to Jerusalem and build their temple.

537 BCE Forty thousand Jews return to Jerusalem.

530 BCE Cyrus is killed in battle with Scythian tribes in Central Asia. Cambyses becomes king of the Persian Empire.

530–522 BCE Cambyses II (Kambujiya II) rules.

525 BCE Cambyses II conquers Egypt.

522 BCE Gaumata revolts against Cambyses II.

Cambyses dies in Syria.

522–486 BCE Darius (Daryavaush I) rules.

521 BCE Darius and six fellow Persian officers kill Gaumata.

521–519 BCE Darius suppresses rebellions against his rule.

518 BCE Persepolis is established as one of the capitals of the Persian Empire.

517 BCE Darius is in Egypt.

516 BCE Darius embarks on a naval mission to India.

515–514 BCE Darius conquers the Indus River Valley.

514 BCE Darius defeats the Scythian tribes north of the Black Sea.

512–511 BCE Persian armies conquer Thrace.

510 BCE Darius's campaign against the European Scythians takes place.

508 BCE The first Athenian Embassy assembles.

506 BCE
The second Athenian Embassy assembles.
499–493 BCE
Ionian Greeks revolt against the Persian Achaemenid Empire.
498 BCE
The Ionians burn Sardis with support from Athens and Eretria.
494 BCE
Ionian rebels are defeated.
493 BCE
Miletus is recovered.
492 BCE
Persian commander Mardonius captures Macedonia.
490 BCE
Persians capture Cyclades and Eretria on the island of Euboea.
In the Battle of Marathon, the Persian fleet is defeated by the Greeks.
486 BCE
A revolt erupts in Egypt.
Darius I dies.
486–465 BCE
Xerxes I (Khshayarsha I) rules.
485 BCE
Xerxes suppresses the revolt in Egypt.
484 BCE
Xerxes suppresses the revolt in Babylon.
481 BCE
Xerxes arrives in Sardis.
480 BCE
Xerxes invades Greece.
The Battle of Thermopylae is fought.
Xerxes captures Athens.
A Persian fleet is defeated in the Battle of Salamis.
Xerxes returns to Sardis.
Persian commander Mardonius remains in Thessaly.
479 BCE
Athens is reoccupied.
Persian troops are defeated in the Battle of Plataea and the Battle of Mycale.
A revolt erupts in Babylon.
Xerxes leaves Sardis.
472 BCE
Aeschylus stages *The Persians*.
465 BCE
Xerxes is murdered and is succeeded by Artaxerxes I.
465–424 BCE
Artaxerxes I (Artakhshacha I) rules.
460 BCE
Athens sends a naval expedition in support of rebels in Egypt.
460–454 BCE
Egypt revolts.
455/454 BCE
The revolt in Egypt is suppressed. The Athenian forces in Egypt are defeated by a Persian army.
449 BCE
Athens sends a delegation to negotiate peace with Artaxerxes I.
The Peace of Callias between the Persian Empire and Athens ends the Persian Wars.
441 BCE
The temple and walls of Jerusalem and Judaea are rebuilt with support from Artaxerxes I.
431–404 BCE
The Peloponnesian War between Athenian and Spartan alliances occurs.
424–423 BCE
Xerxes II rules.
423 BCE
Xerxes II is murdered.
Sogdianos (Sogdian) rules for six and a half months before being defeated by Arses (Darius II).
423–404 BCE
Darius II rules.

416 BCE The revolt of Pissouthnes, the Persian-appointed governor of Sardis, breaks out.
414–412 BCE Amorgos, the son of Pissouthness, continues his father's revolt in western Asia Minor.
Athens supports the revolt of Amorgos. Darius II throws his support behind Sparta.
413 BCE An Athenian fleet is destroyed by Sparta.
410/408 BCE The revolt of Media is suppressed.
404 BCE Egypt revolts and breaks away from the Persian Empire.
404–359 BCE Artaxerxes II becomes the ruler of the Persian Empire.
402/401 BCE Cyrus the Younger revolts against his brother, Artaxerxes II.
401 BCE Cyrus the Younger is defeated and killed in the Battle of Cunaxa.
Ten thousand defeated Greek mercenaries return home after the Battle of Cunaxa.
394 BCE Persian forces and their Greek allies destroy a Spartan fleet in the Battle of Cnidus.
387 BCE The Peace of Antalcidas, or King's Peace, dictated by the Persian king to Greeks ends the Corinthian War.
362 BCE The revolt of Satraps erupts.
359 BCE Philip II becomes the king of Macedonia.
359–338 BCE Artaxerxes III rules.
343–342 BCE The Persian reconquest of Egypt is completed.
338 BCE Artaxerxes III is poisoned.
Macedonia defeats the Greeks in the Battle of Chaeronea.
338–336 BCE Arses rules.
336 BCE Philip II of Macedon is assassinated.
336–330 BCE Darius III rules.
333 BCE Alexander of Macedon defeats Darius III in the Battle of Issus in southern Anatolia in present-day Turkey.
331 BCE Alexander defeats Darius III at Gaugamela (Arbela) in northern Mesopotamia.
330 BCE The Persian capital of Persepolis is burned by Alexander.
Darius III is murdered. The Achaemenid dynasty ends.
327 BCE Alexander arrives in India.
323 BCE Alexander dies.
323–301 BCE War erupts among Alexander's army commanders.

305–64 BCE: Seleucid Empire

312 BCE Seleucus I captures Babylon and the Seleucid state is founded.
305–302 BCE Seleucus I imposes his rule on Iran.
305–281 BCE Seleucus I rules.
305 BCE Seleucia-on-Tigris is founded by Seleucus I.
Seleucus I consolidates his rule over eastern Iran.
301 BCE Seleucus I and Lysimachus defeat Antigonus at Ipsus.
300 BCE Antioch is founded by Seleucus I.

282 BCE Seleucus I designates his son Antiochus as co-regent.
281 BCE Seleucus I defeats Lysimachus and seizes Asia Minor.
Seleucus I is murdered.
281–261 BCE Soter, the son of Seleucus I, rules.
280–279 BCE War breaks out between Antiochus I and Ptolemy II of Egypt.
278 BCE Celts invade Asia Minor from Macedonia.
275 BCE Antiochus I defeats the Celts.
274–271 BCE War erupts between Antiochus I and Ptolemy II.
261–246 BCE Theos, son of Antiochus I, rules.
250 BCE The Cappadocian kingdom is founded by the Persian Ariarathes.
260–253 BCE War breaks out between Antiochus II and Ptolemy II of Egypt.
252 BCE Antiochus II divorces his wife, Laodice, and marries Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy and sister of Ptolemy III.
247 BCE The Arsacid (Parthian) state is founded by Arsaces I (Arshak).
247/246 BCE Diodotus, governor of Bactria centered in present-day northern Afghanistan, revolts and declares his independence.
246 BCE Antiochus II dies. Civil war breaks out between the wives of Antiochus II, Laodice and Berenice.
Ptolemy III is proclaimed the ruler of Egypt.
246–225 BCE Seleucus II, son of Antiochus II, rules.
245 BCE Ptolemy III invades and occupies Syria and Mesopotamia.
Ptolemy III withdraws from Syria and Mesopotamia.
241 BCE Peace is established between Seleucus II and Ptolemy III of Egypt.
240 BCE War breaks out between Seleucus II and his brother Antiochus Hierax.
239 BCE Seleucus II is defeated by his brother Antiochus Hierax.
Andragoras, the satrap of Parthia, proclaims independence.
238 BCE Antiochus Hierax is defeated by Attalus I of Perganum.
Attalus I of Perganum is proclaimed king.
Arsaces I, founder of the Arsacid/Parthian state, defeats Andragoras and captures Parthia.
237 BCE Peace is established between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax.
Antiochus Hierax is defeated.
228 BCE Seleucus II invades Iran to suppress the Arsacids/Parthians.
225–223 BCE Seleucus III rules.
223–187 BCE Antiochus III rules.
221–217 BCE War erupts between Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV of Egypt.
220 BCE Antiochus III defeats Molon, the viceroy of Mesopotamia and Iran.
217 BCE Ptolemy III defeats Antiochus III at Eaphia.
Arsaces II ascends the throne.
216–213 BCE War breaks out between Antiochus III and Achaeus, his viceroy in Asia Minor.
209 BCE The Arsacids (Parthians) sue for peace with Antiochus III.
209–205 BCE Antiochus III embarks on a campaign to reimpose Seleucid

sovereignty over eastern Iran.

206 BCE Antiochus manages to temporarily restore Seleucid rule in eastern Iran.

200–198 BCE defeats Ptolemy V of Egypt and conquers Phoenicia and Palestine.

192–188 BCE fights Rome.

191 BCE Phriapatius ascends the Arsacid/Parthian throne.

190 BCE Antiochus III is defeated by Rome.

188 BCE Antiochus III signs a peace treaty with Rome. Antiochus III loses Asia Minor.

187 BCE Antiochus III dies.

187–175 BCE Seleucus IV, son of Antiochus III, rules.

175–164 BCE Antiochus IV, brother of Seleucus IV, rules.

171 BCE The Arsacid/Parthian monarch Mithridates I ascends the throne.

164 BCE Antiochus IV dies.

164–162 BCE Antiochus V rules.

162–150 BCE Demetrius I rules.

150 BCE With support from Egypt, Alexander Balas defeats Demetrius I.

150–145 BCE Alexander Balas rules.

148/147 BCE The Arsacid monarch Mithridates I captures Media.

145 BCE War breaks out between Antiochus VI, supported by General Tryphon, and Demetrius II, supported by Egypt.

145–142 BCE Antiochus VI rules.

145–141 BCE Demetrius II rules.

141 BCE Mithridates I enters Mesopotamia and seizes Seleucia.

Demetrius II attacks the Arsacid state.

Demetrius II is defeated and imprisoned by the Arsacid king Mithridates I.

141–126 BCE The Arsacids/Parthians conquer western Iran and Mesopotamia.

138–129 BCE Antiochus VII Sidetes, brother of Demetrius II, rules.

129 BCE Antiochus VII is defeated and killed by the Arasacid monarch Phraates II. Seleucid rule in Iran ends.

247 BCE–224 CE: Arsacid (Parthian) Empire

247 BCE The Parthian era begins.

238 BCE Arsaces I captures Parthia.

230–228 BCE Arsaces defends his kingdom against Seleucus II.

217–191 BCE Arsaces II rules.

210 BCE The eastern campaign of Antiochus III begins.

Parthians sue for peace with Antiochus III.

191–176 BCE Phriapatius rules.

176–171 BCE Phraates I (Frahata I) rules. Parthian territory extends to the eastern borders of Media.

175 BCE Antiochus IV Epiphanes seizes the Seleucid throne at Antioch.

171–139/138 BCE Mithridates I (Mithradata I) rules.

148/147 BCE
Mithridates I conquers Media in western Iran.
141 BCE
Mithridates I captures Seleucia.
Parthians occupy Susa in southwestern Iran.
Parthians defeat and imprison the Seleucid king Demetrius II.
139/138 BCE
Mithridates I dies and is succeeded by Phraates II.
139/138–128 BCE
Phraates II rules.
130 BCE
Kushans rule Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan.
129 BCE
The Seleucid king Antiochus VII Sidetes is defeated by the Arsacid (Parthian) king, Phraates II.
128 BCE
Scythian tribes invade Parthian territory from Central Asia.
Phraates II is killed in a battle with Scythians.
128–124/123 BCE
Artabanus I (Ardavan I) rules.
124/123 BCE
Artabanus I dies in battle against the Tochari from Central Asia.
124/123–88/87 BCE
Mithridates II rules.
Mithridates II captures Babylonia.
Mithridates II occupies Armenia.
Mithridates II imposes Arsacid (Parthian) rule over Scythians in Sistan (eastern Iran).
Arsacid (Parthian) rule is extended to southern Afghanistan.
120 BCE
The empire of Mithridates of Pontus emerges.
120–91 BCE
Mithridates of Pontus allies himself with Rome.
100–91 BCE
Mithridates of Pontus attacks Roman-held territories in Asia Minor.
91/90–81/80 BCE
Gotarz I (Gotarz I) rules.
90–88 BCE
Mithridates of Pontus captures Cappadocia in Asia Minor.
87–86 BCE
Mithridates of Pontus is forced out of Greece by the Romans.
85–74 BCE
Roman provinces in Asia are recaptured by Sulla.
81/80–76/75 BCE
Orodes I (Urud I) rules.
78/77–71/70 BCE
Smatruces rules.
71/70–58/57 BCE
Phraates III rules.
A conflict erupts between Parthia and Rome.
67–63 BCE
The Roman commander Pompey captures Armenia and Syria and puts an end to the Seleucid state, making the Roman state the neighbor of the Arsacid (Parthian) state.
63 BCE
Mithridates of Pontus dies.
58/57 BCE
Mithridates III rules.
58/57–38 BCE
Orodes II rules.
53 BCE
The Parthian commander Surena (Suren) defeats the Romans under the command of Crassus at Carrhae.
38 BCE
Arsacid crown prince Pacorus invades Syria and is killed by Romans.
Orodes II dies.
38–3/2 BCE
Phraates IV rules.
37 BCE
Roman general Mark Antony captures Jerusalem. Herod is installed as king of Judaea, replacing the Arsacid (Parthian) governor.
37–33 BCE
Arsacids (Parthians) defeat Antony.
33 BCE
Tiridates revolts against Phraates IV.

31 BCE Antony is defeated and killed by Octavian in the Battle of Actium in Egypt.
30 BCE Tiridates flees to Rome.
27 BCE–14 BCE Octavian Augustus rules.
20 BCE The Arsacid monarch Phraates IV returns Roman legionary standards captured from Crassus and Antony.
3/2 BCE Phraates IV is murdered.
2 BCE–2 CE Phraates V rules.
1 CE Parthian forces withdraw from Armenia.
8/9 CE Vonones I rules.
10/11–38 CE Artabanus II rules.
34 CE Arsaces is appointed king of Armenia by Artabanus II.
38–45 CE Vardanes rules.
40–90 CE The Kushan king Kujula Kadphises rules.
43/44–51 CE Gotarzes II rules.
50 CE Kushans cross the Hindu Kush mountain range to invade India.
51 CE Vonones II rules.
51/76–80 CE Vologeses I (Valakhsh I) rules.
54 CE Nero succeeds Claudius as emperor of Rome.
66 CE Prince Tiridates is crowned in Rome as the king of Armenia. The Arsacid dynasty of Armenia is established.
70 CE Roman emperor Titus captures Jerusalem and destroys the Jewish Temple.
77/78 CE Vologeses II rules.
77/78–108/109 CE Pacorus (Pakor) rules.
79–81 CE Artabanus III rules.
108/109–127/128 CE Osroes rules.
111/112–147/148 CE Vologeses III rules.
113 CE Roman emperor Trajan invades Armenia and Mesopotamia.
115 CE Trajan captures the Arsacid (Parthian) capital of Ctesiphon near modern-day Baghdad.
122 CE Peace ensues between Rome and Parthia.
127/128/129–149/150 CE Kanishka I rules the Kushan Empire.
133 CE Alans invade the Caucasus region and Media.
135 CE Jews are expelled from Judea by the Romans.
147/148–191/192 CE Vologeses IV rules.
157 CE Vologeses IV seizes control of Characene in southern Mesopotamia.
161 CE Parthian forces capture Commagene in northern Syria.
161–180 CE Marcus Aurelius rules as Roman emperor.
163–166 CE Roman armies under Avidius Cassius destroy the city of Seleucia-on-Tigris and sack the Parthian capital at Ctesiphon. Roman forces advance as far as Media in western Iran.
191/192–207/208 CE Vologeses V rules.
193–211 CE Septimius Severus rules as Roman emperor.

194 CE Roman armies invade the western provinces of the Parthian Empire.
197 CE Septimius Severus sacks the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon.
207/208–221/222 CE Vologeses VI rules.
213–224 CE Artabanus IV rules.
216 CE The Iranian prophet Mani is born.
217 CE Roman emperor Caracalla dies.
Macrinus is declared Roman emperor.
Artabanus IV attacks Roman positions in Mesopotamia.
Artabanus IV agrees to make peace with Roman emperor Marcinus. Roman forces withdraw from Syria.
222–235 CE Severus Alexander becomes Roman emperor.
224 CE Arsacid (Parthian) vassal Ardashir defeats and kills Artabanus IV. The Arsacid (Parthian) Empire ends.
Ardashir I ascends the throne as *shahanshah* (king of kings) and the founder of the Sasanian dynasty.
224–239/240/241/242 CE Ardashir I rules.
225 CE Kushans submit to Ardashir. Sasanian state reaches Peshavar in present-day Pakistan.
230 CE Sasanian forces invade Roman positions in Mesopotamia.
231–233 CE Roman emperor Severus Alexander invades Iran.
237–238 CE Ardashir conquers Carrhae and Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey.
238–244 CE Gordian III rules as Roman emperor.
239/240 CE Ardashir attacks the trade center of Hatra in northern Iraq.
Ardashir appoints his son Shapur as co-regent.
239/240/241 CE Shapur I rules.
242–270/272 CE The Iranian prophet Mani joins Shapur's court.
244 CE Shapur I defeats the Romans under Emperor Gordian III at Anbar in southern Iraq. Gordian dies or is murdered in his camp.
244–249 CE Philip the Arab becomes the emperor of Rome. Philip negotiates a peace treaty with Shapur I and pays him 500,000 gold dinars.
252 CE Shapur I destroys a Roman army at Barbalissos in northern Syria and captures Antioch.
253–260 CE Valerian rules the Roman Empire.
260 CE Shapur I captures Emperor Valerian.
261 CE Fulvius Macrianus repulses the Sasanian army.
270/272–273 CE Hormizd I rules.
273–276 CE Bahram I rules.
276 CE Zoroastrian priest Kartir is appointed as the highest authority in the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy.
The prophet Mani is tried and imprisoned.
276–293 CE Bahram II rules.
293 CE Bahram III rules.
293–302 CE Narseh rules.

296–297 CE Narseh invades and occupies Armenia. Caesar Gaius Galerius of Rome is defeated at Carrhae in present-day southeastern Turkey.
297/298 CE Caesar Galerius defeats Narseh. Narseh surrenders five provinces east of the Tigris River.
301 CE Armenia becomes the first kingdom to adopt Christianity as the state religion.
302–309 CE Hormozd I rules.
309–379 CE Shapur II rules.
311 CE Christianity is legalized in the Roman Empire.
324 CE Constantine reunifies the Roman Empire.
325 CE Shapur II pacifies Arab tribes.
338 CE Shapur II reclaims the provinces lost by Narseh.
348 CE Shapur II invades Mesopotamia.
350 CE Shapur II fails to capture Nisibis in present-day southern Turkey.
359 CE Shapur II captures Amida (present-day Diyarbakir) in southeastern Asia Minor.
361–363 CE Julian rules as Roman emperor.
363 CE Emperor Julian is killed in battle after failing to capture the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon.
Jovian becomes Roman emperor.
Emperor Jovian and Shapur II reach a peace agreement. The Sasanian Empire regains all provinces seized by Diocletian as well as Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey.
Shapur II captures Sinjara (Sinjar) in northwestern Iraq.
370 CE The collection of Zoroastrian sacred texts, the *Avesta,* completed.
379–383 CE Ardashir II rules.
383–388 CE Shapur III rules.
388–399 CE Bahram IV rules.
390 CE Armenia is divided between the Roman and Sasanian Empires.
394 CE Christianity is declared the official religion of the Roman Empire.
395 CE The Roman Empire is divided into eastern and western segments.
399–421 CE Yazdegerd I rules.
420–421 CE War breaks out with the East Roman Empire.
421 CE Peace ensues between the Sasanians and the East Roman state.
421–439 CE Bahram V Gor rules.
427 CE Bahram V defeats the Hephthalites.
428 CE The Arsacid monarchy of Armenia ends.
439–457 CE Yazdegerd II rules.
440–441 CE War breaks out with the East Roman Empire.
442–450 CE Yazdegerd II attacks the Kidarites and drives them beyond the Oxus.
457–458 CE Hormozd II attacks the Hephthalites in Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan.
457–459 CE Hormozd II rules.
459 CE Hormozd III is killed by his brother Peroz.

459–484 CE
Peroz I rules.
476 CE
The Western Roman Empire falls.
483 CE
Peroz is defeated by the Hephthalites.
484 CE
Peroz is killed in his third battle with the Hephtalites in Balkh in northern Afghanistan.
484–488 CE
Balash (Valakhsh) rules.
War with the Hephthalites breaks out.
485 CE
Balash concludes peace with Armenia.
488 CE
Balash is deposed from the throne.
488–496 CE
Kavad I rules.
490 CE
Mazdak emerges as the leader of a popular movement calling for peace and equality.
496 CE
Kavad is deposed by the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood.
496–498 CE
Jamasp, Zamasp rules.
498/499 CE
Kavad regains his throne with support from Hephthalites.
499–531 CE
Kavad I rules again.
510 CE
The Turks appear on the northern border of China.
526 CE
Roman forces invade Armenia and Mesopotamia.
527 CE
War breaks out with the Byzantine Empire.
531–579 CE
Khosrow I Anushiravan rules. Governmental reforms are introduced.
532/533 CE
Signs the Eternal Peace (Pax Perpetuum) with Byzantine emperor Justinian.
540 CE
Khosrow I breaks the Eternal Peace and invades northern Mesopotamia and Syria.
Khosrow I captures Antioch in southern Anatolia and northern Syria.
558 CE
A joint Sasanian–Western Turk offensive destroys the Hephthalite Empire.
570 CE
Sasanians invade and occupy Yemen.
Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, is born in Mecca.
571 CE
The Turk state appoints Sogdian chief Maniakh as its ambassador to the Byzantine Empire.
572–591 CE
Byzantine–Sasanian war erupts.
579 CE
Khosrow I dies.
579–590 CE
Hormozd IV rules.
590–591 CE
Bahram VI Chobin rules.
590–628 CE
Khosrow II Parvez rules.
591 CE
Bahram VI is defeated and after a year is assassinated.
602–628 CE
Byzantine–Sasanian war breaks out.
613 CE
A Sasanian army led by Persian commanders Shahrbaraz and Shahen capture Mesopotamia and the Caucasus.
Muhammad begins his teachings as the messenger of God.
613 CE
The Battle of Antioch ensues between the Byzantine and Sasanian armies.

614 CE Sasanian armies capture Jerusalem and bring part of the True Cross to Ctesiphon.
619 CE Sasanian armies attack and seize Egypt.
622 CE Muhammad's Flight (Hijra) from Mecca to Medina takes place.
627 CE Byzantine forces defeat the Sasanian armies in northern Iraq.
628 CE Khosrow II is murdered. Kavad II Shiruya rules.
Kavad II dies.
628–630 CE Ardashir III rules.
629 CE Heraclius returns the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem.
630 CE Muhammad conquers Mecca.
Shahrbaraz rules.
Khosrow III rules.
630–631 CE Boran (Purandokht), a daughter of Khosrow II, rules.
631 CE Azarmidokht, a daughter of Khosrow II, rules.
631–632 CE Hormozd V rules.
631–633 CE Khosrow IV rules.
632–651 CE Yazdegerd III rules.
635 CE Muslims capture Damascus.
636 CE Muslims invade the Sasanian Empire.
A Sasanian army is defeated in the Battle of Qadisiyyah.
637 CE Muslims capture the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon.
642 CE A Sasanian army is defeated at Nahavand (Nihavand) in western Iran.
644 CE Umar is assassinated by a Persian captive, Hormozan.
651 CE Yazdegerd III is murdered at Marv (Merv) in Central Asia. The Sasanian Empire ends.

Ancient Cities, Historical Places, and Archaeological Sites

OVERVIEW ESSAY

This chapter contains entries on the most important urban centers, historical places, and archaeological sites of ancient Iran. The territory of ancient Iran provides scholars with a veritable outdoor museum of fascinating and intriguing sites, including cities, palaces, gardens, tombs, temples, inscriptions, roads, and bridges. These sites clearly demonstrate that the kings of ancient Iran were master builders who also devoted themselves to improving their empire's urban and rural economies. Some of the world's earliest irrigation systems arose in Iranian hinterlands, where well-maintained canals and aqueducts led to agricultural development and allowed for the settlement of ancient cities and towns. The ancient Iranian royals were also avid proponents of a highly efficient communication system. The roads they built facilitated the movement of armies but also promoted trade and commerce and helped the central government to secure peace and order across their vast empire. The Royal Road became the best known of these routes and hosted royal courtiers, who became the world's first postal deliverymen. The Suez Canal, built by Darius I, had as its primary objective the promotion of trade between India, the Near East, and Egypt. Indeed, the whole of the Persian Empire from the Indus Valley to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea was linked by sea as well as by land.

The entries in this chapter can be divided into cities and archaeological sites built by each of Iran's pre-Islamic dynasties. The majority of archaeological sites dating back to the Median period, namely Baba Jan Tepe, Godin Tepe, and Tepe Nush-i Jan, are located in the Hamedan-Malayer-Kangavar triangle (also known as the Median Triangle) in western Iran.

The most renowned of Achaemenid ancient sites are the tomb of Cyrus II the Great at Pasargadae, Darius I's inscription at Bisotun, the magnificent palace complex of Persepolis, and the Achaemenid burial

tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam. Pasargadae served as the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire during the reign of Cyrus II the Great (r. 558–530 BCE). It was probably chosen as the first residence of Cyrus because it was the site of his last and decisive battle against the Medes. Aside from the majestic tomb of Cyrus, Pasargadae contained a variety of buildings, including palaces, pavilions, fire altars, gardens, and a large park. Even after the death of Cyrus and the transfer of the capital from Pasargadae to Susa, Ecbatana, and Persepolis, the Achaemenid kings returned to Pasargadae as the site for their royal investiture.

Built by the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) and completed by his successors, Persepolis's pillars, massive floors, and carved reliefs tell the story of one of the world's great empires and symbolize Persian imperial power at its height. The main palace complex, 35.4 miles (57 kilometers) northwest of the city of Shiraz in the southern Iranian province of Fars, rises on a large artificial terrace platform covering an area of 149,499 square yards (125,000 square meters). Ornate palace inscriptions by Darius I welcomed visitors from distant provinces of the Persian Empire. In one of his inscriptions at the site, Darius acknowledged that the building of the structures on the site had been accomplished by artisans who hailed from the various nations that inhabited the Persian Empire. Indeed, the architecture of Persepolis borrowed heavily from the artistic and architectural designs of ancient Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Lydia, and many other nations. Workers from places as far away as Egypt, Lebanon, Asia Minor, India, and Central Asia contributed significantly to the construction and design of the magnificent palace complex. After the death of Darius I, his son and successor Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE) and his grandson Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE) added their own buildings to the palace complex. The main structures of Persepolis consisted of the grand double staircases; the palace of Darius I; the audience palace, known as Apadana; Xerxes I's Throne Hall, better known as the Hall of a Hundred Columns; the palace of Xerxes I; the second palace, or the harem of Xerxes I; the Tripylon, or the entranceway to the private palaces; and the Treasury.

Naqsh-e Rostam (Picture of Rostam), a short distance from both Pasargadae and Persepolis, served as the royal necropolis, or burial site, for four kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty: Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. The grounds of Naqsh-e Rostam include a tall and impressive towering cliff. The resting places of the four Achaemenid kings were designed as cross-shaped tombs cut into the rock. A door in the center of the facade provided access to the interior of each royal tomb. A large cube-shaped building called Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) stands across the rock-cut

tombs. The structure was probably built sometime during the Achaemenid period and contains a staircase and a door as well as blind windows in dark gray limestone on all four sides. The function of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht is unknown. Some scholars have maintained that the building was used as a site for royal coronations, while others have argued that it may have been used as a depository for religious or governmental records.

Few standing structures can be traced back to the Arsacid (Parthian) period (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE). Perhaps the most important historical and archaeological site of the Arsacid dynasty is Nisa, which is located near the village of Bagir, 6 miles (10 kilometers) west of Ashgabat, the capital of the Republic of Turkmenistan. There is no settled consensus among archaeologists who have studied Nisa regarding the function and purpose of the site and its numerous buildings. It has been variously described as an Arsacid (Parthian) capital city, a royal residence, an army fortress, and even a major religious center.

Numerous historical and archaeological sites remain from the Sasanian period. Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis originally served as an Achaemenid necropolis, but during the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE) it emerged as an important center for royal and religious ceremonies. Eight Sasanian rock reliefs are carved at the base of the cliff below the tombs of the Achaemenid kings. The most impressive of these is the victory relief of the Sasanian monarch Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE). The Persian king of kings sits on a horse, while the captured Roman emperor, identified by some as Valerian, kneels before him. Two other Roman figures appear on the relief. The first, believed by many to be Emperor Gordian III, has fallen and died next to the majestic horse of the Persian king; the second Roman figure, identified by some as Emperor Philip the Arab and by others as Emperor Valerian, stands next to Shapur while his hand is held by the Sasanian monarch. Another impressive rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam depicts the investiture of Ardashir I, founder of the Sasanian dynasty. It shows the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) bestowing the diadem of kingship on Ardashir I, thus implying Ardashir's divine origins. During the reign of Shapur I, three royal inscriptions in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek were also incised into the three walls of the towerlike structure called Ka'ba-ye Zardosht, which stands across from the Achaemenid tombs and the Sasanian rock reliefs. Below the Middle Persian inscription, the powerful Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, who served the Sasanian monarchs Shapur I, Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II, added his own inscription.

Another important Sasanian site is the city of Bishapur. Located in

the southern Iranian province of Fars, the city was built by the Sasanian monarch Shapur I to celebrate his victorious campaigns against three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. Bishapur was constructed at the foot of a mountain where the Shapur River cuts through a gorge and opens onto a wide open plain. Roman prisoners of war most probably participated in the construction of the new city, which was surrounded by massive walls and deep, wide moats. Three rock reliefs along the sides of the Bishapur River gorge commemorated Shapur's triumph over Roman emperors, and three other reliefs added later by the Sasanian kings Bahram I, Bahram II, and Shapur II indicate that the city was viewed as an important urban center in the third and fourth centuries CE and was frequently visited by Sasanian kings. Aside from these rock reliefs, archaeologists also discovered several buildings at Bishapur. These structures include a palace, a temple, and a building and courtyard with intricate floor mosaics depicting Persian nobles as well as musicians. In a large limestone cave a few miles outside Bishapur stands a colossal statue nearly 22 feet (6.70 meters) high of Shapur I.

Another important Sasanian historical site is Taq-e Bostan, located near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. The Persian term *taq* means "arch," and *bostan* means "garden." Taq-e Bostan therefore means "Garden's Arch." The site is home to two arched grottoes, two royal investiture scenes, and two highly detailed reliefs of a royal hunt dating back to the reign of the Sasanian dynasty. The reliefs provide the visitor with a rare glimpse into the daily life of Iran's Sasanian kings.

The oldest relief at Taq-e Bostan depicts the investiture of the Sasanian monarch Ardashir II (r. 379–383 CE). Carved into a rectangular rock frame, the bas-relief shows the Persian king receiving the diadem of kingship and sovereignty from the hands of a crowned figure identified previously as the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and more recently as Ardashir's predecessor, Shapur II. Behind Ardashir II stands the sun god, Mithra, the guarantor of covenants and oaths. Mithra, who wears a crown festooned by rays of sun, holds a bundle of sacred twigs known as *barsom* and stands on a large lotus flower. Ardashir II and Ohrmazd/Shapur II stand on the body of a defeated foe, perhaps a Roman emperor.

Next to the bas-relief of the investiture of Ardashir II are two grottoes. On the back wall of the first and smaller grotto stand the sculptures of Shapur III (r. 383–388 CE), the immediate successor to Ardashir II, next to his father, Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE). The hands of both monarchs rest on the pommel of a large sword. Next is the larger arched grotto. The back wall of this grotto is divided into upper and lower panels. The upper panel depicts the investiture of Khosrow II

Parvez (Parviz), who ruled from 590 to 628 CE. The Sasanian monarch stands in the middle and is flanked on the right by the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda), who is handing the Persian king the diadem of power. To the left of the king stands Anahid (Anahita), the goddess of waters and the patron deity of the Sasanian royal family. In the lower panel stands the statue of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II mounted on his horse, Shabdez (Shabdiz). Both the horse and his rider are dressed in full battle armor from head to foot. The face of the Persian monarch is completely covered and therefore invisible. On the interior left wall of the grotto appears a highly detailed carved relief of a royal boar hunt. The king is portrayed twice as he stands in a large boat targeting wild boars with his bow and arrow, while elephant riders drive the animals from the surrounding marshes toward the monarch. As the king discharges his arrows at the boars, female musicians in smaller boats play music. On the interior right wall is another detailed relief depicting the king three times: first as he arrives on his horse in the hunting ground, a second time as he rides and hunts deer in a forest, and finally as he departs the scene after the end of the hunt. As in the boar hunt, here too musicians are depicted playing their instruments.

Afrasiyab, City of. *See* Samarqand

Asaac

A city that played an important role in the history and identity of the Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE). In his *Parthian Stations,* which provided a short account of overland trade routes between the Levant and India in the first century BCE, Isidore of Charax provided important information about several cities in the northeastern and eastern regions of the Parthian Empire. The first of these cities was Asaac. Isidore of Charax wrote that after departing Hyrcania (Gorgan) in northern Iran, the traveler reaches Astauena “in which there are 12 villages in which there are stations; and the city of Asaac, in which Arsaces,” the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, “was first proclaimed king; and an everlasting fire” was “guarded there” (Isidore of Charax: 4). Isidore also stated that beyond this district was Parthyena, within which is a valley, and the city of Parthaunisa, where there are royal tombs. There is no information on the exact location of Asaac, and archaeologists have not been able to identify the site, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran

(Debevoise: 10–11).

For decades there was a debate among historians and archaeologists about the exact location of Asaac and Parthaunisa. Parthaunisa was believed by many scholars to be not only the first capital of the Arsacid dynasty but also its religious and spiritual heart. Beginning in 1930, Soviet archaeologists A. A. Marushchenko and A. S. Bashkirov conducted scientific investigation on the present-day site of Nisa, located near Ashgabat, the capital of the then Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan. These ruins have since been confirmed as the Parthaunisa described by Isidore of Charax. Nisa has been described as one of the capital cities of the Arsacid dynasty, a "sacred fortress of the Parthian kings," a royal residence of Parthian monarchs, or even a "Parthian dynastic or general religious center" (Pilipko: 114). Nisa is located near the village of Bagir, 6 miles (10 kilometers) west of Ashgabat, the capital of the Republic of Turkmenistan. The "fortified site of Staraia (Old) Nisa is situated on the southeastern fringe of Bagir, while Novaia (New) Nisa is on the southwestern fringe. The distance between the two sites is 1.5 kilometers" (Pilipko: 114).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Nisa; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; *Peoples:* Arsacids

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Bibi Shahrbanu

A shrine located in Ray, south of the present-day Iranian capital of Tehran. The shrine of Bibi Shahrbanu may have originally been a holy place dedicated to the worship of the Zoroastrian divinity Anahita (Anahid), the goddess of water. According to a legendary account that dates from the beginning of the Islamic era, the shrine contains the body of Shahrbanu, a daughter of Yazdegerd III (r. 633–651 CE), the last king of the Persian Sasanian dynasty. According to this legend, after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the death of Yazdegerd III, Shahrbanu was captured by the invading Arab armies and transported to Medina in Hejaz in western Arabia, where she married Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and the second son of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the messenger of Islam, and of Fatima, the favorite daughter of Muhammad. According to the same legend, this marriage of Hussein and Shahrbanu produced a son. This son, Ali Zayn al-Abedin, succeeded his father after Hussein was martyred on the plains of Karbala in southern Iraq in 680. According to this legendary lineage, the Shia imams, beginning with Zayn al-Abedin, had royal Persian blood and were directly descended, through Shahrbanu, from the Sasanian royal family. Meanwhile, after the death of her husband Shahrbanu returned to Iran, but the enemies of her husband pursued her all the way to Ray. In a last desperate effort to save her life, the Persian princess sought God's protection, but instead of shouting "Oh God" ("Yallahu") she mistakenly uttered "Oh Mountain" ("Ya Kuh"). In response to this plea, the mountain suddenly opened, allowing her to conceal herself among the rocks (Boyce: Bībī Šahrbanū). Sometime later a tomb was erected on the site, which emerged as a major shrine for pilgrims through many centuries down to our own time. No historical evidence exists to confirm the validity of the Shahrbanu legend and her marriage to the third Shia imam, Hussein. The scholar Mary Boyce has maintained that the shrine originated as a pre-Islamic holy place dedicated to the veneration of the "Zoroastrian divinity" Anahita (Anahid), who carried the title "Banu" (Lady), and "her shrine at Ray may well have been devoted to her as Shahrbanu, 'Lady of the Land' (i.e., Iran)" (Boyce: Bībī Šahrbanū).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Ray; *Religion:* Anahita

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Bishapur

A city built by the Sasanian monarch Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE) in the southern Iranian province of Fars after his campaigns against three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. During his long reign, Shapur I fought several major wars with the Romans. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in the province of Fars, Shapur stated that after he had ascended the throne, the Roman emperor Gordian III (r. 238–244 CE) marched on Assyria but was killed on the battlefield (Frye: 371–373). The large Roman army initially had succeeded in capturing Nisibis (present-day Nusaybin in southeastern Turkey) but was defeated at Anbar in present-day Iraq in 244. Gordian's successor, Phillipus or Philip the Arab (r. 244–249 CE), negotiated a peace agreement with Shapur I and paid him 500,000 dinarii, but war resumed after Shapur I accused the Romans of lying and treating Armenia with injustice. The Sasanian army attacked and defeated a Roman force of 60,000 at Barbalissos on the Euphrates. The defeat of the large Roman force exposed Roman possessions in Syria, including Antioch and Dura Europos, to attacks from the Persians. Shapur I used his impressive victory at Barbalissos to capture Armenia. One of Shapur's sons, Hormozd, was appointed the ruler of Armenia.

The Roman Empire could not allow Shapur I to get away with such a victory without any adverse consequences. Thus, when the Persian monarch attacked and laid siege to Carrhae (present-day Harran) and Edessa (modern-day Urfa) in present-day southeastern Turkey, the Roman emperor Valerian (r. 253–260 CE) marched against him with a force of 70,000. Either through trickery or combat, Shapur captured Valerian as well as a group of army commanders and Roman senators, who were sent to Fars in southern Iran and were later settled in various parts of the Sasanian Empire (Frye: 372).

After returning from his capture of Valerian, Shapur I celebrated his victories by building a city in the present-day Iranian province of Fars, the birthplace of the Sasanian monarchy. The new city of Bishapur was constructed at the foot of a mountain, where the Shapur River cuts through a gorge and opens onto a wide open plain. Scholars have debated whether the name Bishapur derives from Weh Andiyok Shapur (meaning "the City of Shapur is more beautiful than Antioch")

or Weh Shapur (meaning “the beautiful City of Shapur”) or Bay Shapur (Middle Persian for “Lord Shapur”). Regardless, it is significant to note that Roman prisoners of war most probably participated in the construction of the new city, which was surrounded by massive walls and deep, wide ditches.

Bishapur was first excavated in the 1930s and early 1940s by a team of French archaeologists, led by Roman Ghirshman. At least one of the buildings excavated displayed Roman influence. Three rock reliefs on the sides of the Bishapur River gorge, commemorating Shapur’s triumph over Roman emperors, and three other reliefs added later by the Sasanian kings Bahram I (r. 273–276), Bahram II (r. 276–293), and Shapur II (r. 309–379) indicate that the city was viewed as an important urban center in the third and fourth centuries CE and was frequently visited by Sasanian kings. Shapur I may have died in Bishapur during a visit to the city.

Three of the rock reliefs at Bishapur date back to the reign of Shapur I. One of these portrays the investiture ceremony of the king. Seated on his horse, Shapur I receives the royal diadem from the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda). The king’s horse has trampled a figure believed by some scholars to be the Roman emperor Gordian III, and Ahura Mazda’s horse has killed the evil spirit Ahriman under its hooves. A figure identified by some scholars as the Roman emperor Philip the Arab kneels in a display of defeat and submission. In the second rock relief, Shapur, seated on his horse, receives the diadem of kingship from a winged angel (*putto*) or a naked and winged boy child. A figure identified by some to be the Roman emperor Philip the Arab again kneels in front of the Persian king, who has seized a figure believed to be the Roman emperor Valerian by his wrist. Valerian stands next to Shapur, while a third Roman emperor, probably Gordian III, has been trampled under the hooves of the king’s horse. A third rock relief repeats the triumphal scene of the second relief with the three Roman emperors killed, captured, and subdued, while the Persian king is flanked by his commanders and high government officials. The fourth rock relief shows the investiture of Bahram I, the oldest son of Shapur I, who faces Ohrmazd. Both the god and the king are mounted on horseback. Sitting majestically on his horse, the Sasanian king of kings receives the diadem of royalty from Ohrmazd. The Iranian archaeologist Sarfaraz discovered a figure prostrate beneath Bahram’s horse. The identity of this figure remains uncertain. The fifth rock relief depicts Bahram II seated on his horse, while a group of Arabs stands submissively before him. The sixth rock relief shows Shapur II seated on the royal throne while gifts and trophies are brought to his court.

Ruins of the ancient city of Bishapur in the southern Iranian province of Fars. Bishapur served as an important administrative center during the Sasanian period. The city was named after Shapur I, the second monarch of the Persian Sasanian dynasty. (dbimages/Alamy Stock Photo)

Aside from these rock reliefs, archaeologists also discovered several buildings at Bishapur. These structures include a palace, a temple (most probably devoted to the goddess of water, Anahita [Anahid]), and a building and courtyard with intricate floor mosaics depicting Persian nobles as well as musicians. In a large limestone cave a few miles outside Bishapur stands a colossal statue nearly 22 feet (6.70 meters) high of Shapur I. The statue of the Sasanian monarch, which is "carved out of a huge stalagmite formed *in situ,* is rich in details and sculptured on each side with extraordinary care and attention" (Garosi: Shapur I).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III; Shapur I

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Bisotun Inscription

An inscription incised on a colossal rock relief celebrating the campaigns and victories of the Persian Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486) over rebel leaders who had revolted against his authority after he seized the throne. The Bisotun inscription is one of the most important historical and linguistic documents of the ancient world. Carved into the side of Mount Bisotun, located east of the city of Kermanshah in western Iran, it celebrates Darius's victory over the usurper Gaumata and nine other rebels. Enclosed within a trilingual introduction in Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian languages, the inscription provides a detailed justification for Darius seizing the throne of the Persian Empire after the death of Cambyses II in 522 BCE and describes how he suppressed the numerous rebellions that erupted after his accession. In addition to its historical significance, the inscription offers a crucial opportunity for deciphering the ancient cuneiform script in which it is written.

Darius begins the Bisotun inscription by stating that while his predecessor Cambyses was in Egypt, news arrived that a man claiming to be the king's brother Bardiya had revolted against him. Cambyses started out for home at once but died before reaching his destination. Darius claims in his inscription that the man who had revolted against Cambyses was in fact not Bardiya, the brother of the king, but rather a magian, or a priest, named Gaumata. Darius asserts that before leaving for his campaign to conquer Egypt, Cambyses had secretly ordered the execution of his brother Bardiya to prevent any attempt by his opponents at the court to stage a palace coup in his absence. The murder of the king's brother was, however, kept secret and was known only to a handful of individuals.

Monument of the Persian Achaemenid monarch Darius I the Great at Bisotun in western Iran, near the city of Kermanshah. The monument of Darius I consists of a rock relief, as well as a trilingual inscription describing the events which led to the emergence of Darius as the ruler of the Achaemenid Empire. (Jerome Bon)

Denouncing the new king as an imposter, Darius and six fellow officers marched against Bardiya/Gaumata and killed him in Media, in western Iran. Although the removal of Bardiya/Gaumata from the throne allowed Darius to proclaim himself king, the military coup staged by the officers ignited mass insurrections throughout the empire. Rebels in Elam, Babylon, Persia, Media, Assyria, Egypt, Armenia, Parthia, Hyrcania, Margiana, and Sattagydia declared themselves independent from the central government.

The Bisotun inscription identifies a certain Achina as the man who led the revolt in Elam in present-day southwestern Iran. He proclaimed himself the king of Elam. The Elamites joined Achina and "became rebellious" (Kent: 118–120). Darius did not go to Elam but sent a message to the province. The Elamite rebel leader Achina was captured and delivered to the Persian king, who executed him. Shortly thereafter, another rebellion erupted in Babylon. The leader of this uprising was a certain Nidintu-Bel who claimed to be Nebuchadrezzar, the son of Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire overthrown by Cyrus II the Great (Kent: 118–120). In contrast to his response in Elam, Darius marched against the Babylonian rebels in person. Commanding his forces in two battles against the rebels, he defeated them in both. Babylon was seized, and the rebel leader Nidintu-Bel was captured and executed. While Darius was in Babylon, Persia, Media, Assyria, Egypt, Parthia, Margiana, Sattagydia, the Saka tribes, and, once again, Elam rebelled against him (Kent: 121–123).

This second rebellion in Elam was led by a certain Persian, Martiya, who proclaimed himself Imanish, the king of Elam. Darius and his army were in close proximity to Elam at the time, and those Elamites who apparently wished to avoid bloodshed seized the rebel leader and delivered him to Darius, who executed him. Leadership of the rebellion in Media fell to a certain Fravartish (Phraortes), who claimed to be Khshathrita from the family of the former Median king Huvakhshtra (perhaps the Cyaxares of Herodotus). The Median army stationed in the province rose in rebellion and switched its allegiance to Fravartish, who proclaimed himself the king of Media. Because the Persian and Median units under Darius were small, the king sent an army under the command of his trusted friend Vidarna to suppress the uprising. Vidarna defeated the rebel army in the first battle, but this victory did not put an end to the rebellion. The Persian king then marched with his army to Media while sending another army under the command of an Armenian officer, Dadarshish, to Armenia to quell the rebellion there. After three inconclusive battles with the Armenian rebels, Darius dispatched another commander, Vaumisa, who had to fight two more battles before the Armenian rebels were fully pacified.

Meanwhile, after his victory in Babylon, the inscription records that Darius marched northward to Media, where he fought and defeated Faravartish (Phraortes), who fled to Rhagae (modern-day Ray south of Tehran). An army was sent to capture the rebel leader. Fravartish was seized, tortured, and eventually executed at the former Median capital, Hagmatana or Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan). His closest followers and supporters were flayed, and their hides were stuffed with straw and hung out for everyone to see (Kent: 122–124).

Despite these victories over his rebellious subjects, Darius's troubles were far from over. The inscription recounts that in Sagartia a certain Cichantakhma, who claimed to be from the family of the former Median monarch Huvakhshtra, declared himself king of the Sagartians. Darius dispatched an army under the command of a Persian officer, Takhmaspada, who defeated the rebels, captured Cichantakhma, and sent him to Darius, who impaled him at Arbela (modern-day Arbil/Erbil) in northern Iraq. Meanwhile, Parthia and Hyrcania rose in rebellion against Darius and declared their support for the Median rebel leader Faravartish/Phraortes. Darius asked his father Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) to suppress the rebellion. In his Bisotun inscription, Darius claims that his father defeated the rebels in Parthia and Hyrcania, but it seems that the campaign was inconclusive because the Persian king was forced to send an army to reinforce his father's troops (Kent: 124–127).

The next rebellion mentioned in Darius's inscription is the uprising in Margush (Margiana) led by a certain Frada. An army under the

command of a Persian officer Dadarshi attacked and defeated the rebel army and forced Margush back into the empire's fold. After the rebellion in Media, the most serious challenge to Darius came from Persia, which staged its own rebellion under the leadership of a certain Vahyazdata, who claimed to be the slain prince Bardiya, the second son of Cyrus II the Great (Kent: 125–127). The Persian army, which was stationed in the royal palace but originated from the region of Anshan, rebelled against Darius. In its place, Darius sent an army under the command of a Persian officer by the name of Artavardiya to suppress the rebellion in Persia. After two battles, the rebel Vahyazdata and his followers were captured and sent to Darius, who impaled them. In the Bisotun inscription, Darius states that before his death Vahyazdata had sent an army to Harauvatim or Arachosia (present-day Kandahar or Qandahar in southern Afghanistan) against the Persian governor Vivana, but the latter managed to defeat this army and capture its leader (Kent: 125–128).

While Darius was in Persia and Media, the Babylonians revolted for a second time. This revolt was led by a certain Armenian, Arkha, who claimed to be Nebuchadrezzar, son of Nabonidus, the former king of Babylonia. Darius sent an army against Arkha. This army, commanded by the Persian officer Vidafarna, defeated the Babylonian rebels and captured their leader. Arkha, along with his followers, was subsequently impaled in Babylon (Kent: 126–128).

In the Bisotun inscription, Darius claimed that he and his armies fought a total of 19 battles in the first year of his reign to consolidate his position as the new ruler of the Persian Empire. In the third year of Darius's reign Elam rebelled once again, this time against the Persian king. The leader of the rebellion was a certain Atamaita. Darius dispatched his trusted friend and general Gaubaruva (Gobryas) to suppress the rebellion. Gobryas marched against the rebels, defeated them, and captured their leader. The defeated rebel leader, Atamaita, was sent to Darius, who executed him (Kent: 133–134). After this victory, Darius organized a campaign against the Scythians (Sakas), who wore pointed caps. To reach the land of these Scythians, the Persian army used rafts to cross a body of water, described by Darius in the inscription as a sea. The Persian forces crossed the sea by rafts and defeated the Scythians. The Scythian leader Skunkha was captured and brought to Darius (Kent: 133–134). In his inscription at Bisotun, Darius identified the six Persian officers who had collaborated with him in overthrowing Bardiya/Gaumata. These army commanders were Vidafarna (Intaphernes), Utana (Otanes), Gaubaruva (Gobryas), Vidarna (Hydarnes), Bagabukhsha (Megabyzus), and Ardumanish (Kent: 130, 132).

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cambyses II; Cyrus II the Great; Darius I; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Primary Documents: Document 9

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Bokhara

Also spelled as Bukhara, a predominantly Iranian-populated urban center in ancient Sogdiana, an Iranian-speaking region, that extended from the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in the south to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in the north, with its central region located in the Zarafshan and Kashka Darya River Valleys. Modern-day Bokhara is located in the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan. The meaning of the word "Bokhara" is uncertain. Some have maintained that the name derives from the Sogdian word *bukharak,* meaning "fortunate place," while others have asserted that the name originates from the word *vihara,* the term for a Buddhist monastery (Frye: Bukhara). The first coins discovered in Bokhara resemble Sasanian coins, particularly those dating back to the reign of the Sasanian king of kings Bahram V, who ruled from 421 to 439 CE (Frye: Bukhara). The date for the founding of the city of Bokhara is uncertain. It has been asserted that Bokhara as an urban center did not exist during the reign of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE), nor is the city mentioned by the historians of Alexander, the Macedonian conqueror. In his book *Tarikh-e Bokhara* [History of Bokhara], the historian Abu Bakr Mohammad al-Narshakhi wrote that before the founding of the city, the site of Bokhara was a swamp (al-Narshakhi: 7). The same author mentioned the names of several rulers of Bokhara, suggesting that the city had its own rulers. According to Narshakhi, the rulers of Bokhara carried the title *bokhar khodat* (al-Narshakhi: 10). When Muslim Arabs arrived outside the walls of Bokhara, a woman known

by the title *khatun* ruled the city as a regent for her son (al-Narshakhi: 12). The city of Bokhara was conquered by Muslim Arabs during the reign of Muawiya (r. 661–680) of the Umayyad dynasty, which ruled from 661 to 750 CE (al-Narshakhi: 10–11). As the governor of Khorasan from 705 to 715, the Arab general Qutaiba bin Muslim Baheli focused his campaign on the conquest of the major urban centers of the region, particularly Bokhara and Samarqand. His ultimate objective was to seize the entire territory of Sogdiana.

BOKHARA IN THE POETRY OF RUDAKI

For centuries, the city of Bokhara was regarded as one of the major centers of Persian civilization in Central Asia. The Samanids, who ruled from 819 to 999 CE, designated Bokhara as their capital. The Samanid rulers traced their lineage to Bahram Chobin (Bahram VI), the Persian general who seized the Sasanian throne in 590 and ruled until 591 CE. The greatest Persian poet of the Samanid era was Rudaki (858–ca. 941). Today, Rudaki is generally recognized as the first great Persian poet who composed poems in New Persian. Only a small number of Rudaki's poems have survived. Rudaki's most recognizable poem is the brilliant piece that he composed and sang for the Samanid monarch Amir Nasr ibn Ahmad. The purpose of this poem was to persuade the Samanid ruler to return to Bokhara after a long absence. The poem's exceptional simplicity and rhythmical beauty as well as its delightful description of the Oxus River and the love and adoration displayed for the city of Bokhara ("Long live Bukhara! Be thou of good cheer!") make this one of the most popular and recognizable poems in Persian literature.

The Arabs soon learned, however, that although occupying cities was attainable, religious conversion of an ancient people with their own rich culture and civilization was far more difficult. According to one source, the people of Bokhara converted to Islam several times when the Arab armies laid siege to their town, but on each occasion when the Arabs withdrew the people reverted to their traditional religious practices, which included Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. One of the most important obstacles in conversion to Islam was the Arabic language, which the native population did not understand and found extremely difficult to learn. Thus, in Bokhara, Muslim prayers were recited first in Persian (Farsi) rather than Arabic (al-Narshakhi: 67). Bokhara prospered during the reign of the Persian Samanid dynasty (819–999). The city served as the capital of the Samanid Empire. The anonymous author of the 10th-century Persian geography *Hodud ul-Alam min al-Mashriq ila al-Maghrib* [The Regions of the World from East to West] described Bokhara as the most prosperous city of Transoxiana, which produced a variety of goods, including high-quality carpets and rugs (Anonymous, *Hodud ul-Alam:*

106). The Mongols led by Genghis Khan destroyed Bokhara and massacred its population in 1219.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Oxus Treasure; Samarqand; *Ancient Provinces:* Transoxiana

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Dura Europos

A major urban center and frontier town located on the west bank of the Euphrates River in present-day southeastern Syria. The city was founded during the reign of Seleucus I, the founder of the Seleucid state, by a certain Nicanor, who was a commander in the Seleucid army. Initially, the city served as a stopping point for those traveling between the two major urban centers of the Seleucid Empire, namely Seleucia-on-Tigris in present-day southern Iraq and Antioch in northern Syria (present-day southern Turkey). Dura Europos was seized by the Parthian armies around 114/113 BCE during the reign of the Arsacid monarch Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE). The city remained under Parthian rule for nearly three centuries. Parthian rule over Dura Europos was interrupted several times when Roman armies attacked and occupied the territory lying on the right bank of the Euphrates. The most important of these invasions took place during the reign of Roman emperor Trajan between 114 and 117 CE. During this campaign Trajan sacked Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital, and eventually reached the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The Romans recaptured Dura Europos again in 165. They used the city as part of a line of defense against raids carried out by Parthian armies. After the overthrow of the Arsacid dynasty in 224 CE, the new royal house of Iran, the Persian Sasanians, focused on Dura Europos as a target of reconquest. During the reign of the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), the Persian armies attacked the city and after a long siege of seven months captured it. After the fall of the city in 256 CE, the Sasanians deported the population of Dura

Europos, and the vibrant urban center ceased to exist. According to Pierre Leriche, “the determined resistance put up by the inhabitants” of Dura Europos forced the Sasanians “to adopt various siege tactics, which eventually resulted in conquest of the city; the defensive system, the mines, and the assault ramp were left in place after the deportation of the population, which permits modern investigators to gain an exact idea of the military techniques of the Sasanians and the Romans in the mid-3rd century” (Leriche: Dura Europos).

Citadel of the ancient city of Dura Europos in present-day Syria, situated on the right bank of the Euphrates. The city was founded by the Seleucid general Nicanor and prospered under Parthian rule. (age fotostock/Alamy Stock Photo)

In excavations at Dura Europos “a small quantity of Parthian material has been found, notably a scrap of fine parchment bearing the formal opening of a business letter, written probably about the mid-3rd century A.D.,” as well as “a few Parthian ostraca,” two of which “are well preserved and contain lists of names, possibly pay lists” (Boyce: 1154). These finds establish “the origin and character of the Parthian system of writing, and indicates the range of its uses” (Boyce: 1154). They also show that “the Parthian scribes, inheriting their craft from Achaemenian predecessors, remained uninfluenced by the use of written Greek in Seleucid Iran, which continued in Bactria and the Greek cities of Parthia itself” (Boyce: 1154). Leriche identifies the structures at Dura Europos in the following fashion: “1. Temple of Aphlad, 2. Temple of Zeus Kyrios, 3. Christian building, 4. Bath, 5. House of the Scribes (inset: synagogue), 6. Temple of Adonis, 7. Mithraeum, 8. Temple of Bel, 9. Temple of Artemis Azzanathkona, 10. Praetorium, 11. Bath and amphitheater, 12. Temple of Jupiter

Dolichenus (Dolicheneum), 13. Palace of the Dux Ripae, 14. Military temple, 15. Temple of Zeus Theos, 16. House of Nebuchelus, 17. House of the Frescoes, 18. Temple of the Gads, 19. Temple of Atargatis, 20. Temple of Artemis Nanaïa, 21. House of the Large Atrium, 22. House of Lysias, 23. Temple of Zeus Megistos, 24. Redoubt palace (Strategion), and 25. Bath" (Leriche: Dura Europos).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates II; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur I; *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Ecbatana

The ancient city of Ecbatana (Old Persian: Hagmatana; New Persian: Hamedan) was the metropolis of Media. A large walled city, it served as the capital of the Median Empire (?–550/549 BCE). It was also the summer capital of the Achaemenid (r. 550–330 BCE) and Parthian (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) Empires (Strabo: 11.13.1–2). The city was situated on the important highway connecting Central Asia and Iran to Mesopotamia. According to the Greek author Herodotus, Ecbatana served as the capital of the Median Empire until it was captured by Cyrus II the Great. Herodotus claimed that the city was designated as the capital by Deioces (Old Iranian: Dahyuka), whom the Greek author identified as the founder of the kingdom of Media. Herodotus wrote:

> Once firmly on the throne, Deioces compelled the Medes to build a single great city to which, as the capital of the country, all other towns were to be held of secondary importance. Again they complied, and the city now known as Ecbatana was built, a place of great size and strength fortified by concentric walls, these so planned that each successive circle was higher than the one below. The plan of the place is, that each of the walls should out-top the one beyond it by the battlements. … These fortifications were to protect the king Deioces and his palace; the people had to build their houses outside the circuit of the walls. (Herodotus: 1.98–1.99)

The accuracy of the statement made by Herodotus has been questioned by some historians of ancient Iran. First, despite two centuries of involvement in Median-populated areas of the central Zagros, the Assyrians made no reference to Ecbatana. Second, there is no archaeological evidence of Median existence on Ecbatana's hills. In either 554/553 or 550/549 BCE, Cyrus II, the king of Anshan in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars, defeated the king of Media, Astyages; occupied Ecbatana; and carried the imperial treasury back with him to his kingdom.

In 522 BCE when Darius I proclaimed himself the king, rebellions erupted in various provinces of the empire. Media was one of the major centers of unrest, forcing Darius to lead an army there until the rebellion of the Median pretender Fravartish (Phraortes) was suppressed and the rebel leader had been executed. Situated on the eastern slopes of the Zagros mountain range and the foot of Mount Alvand, Ecbatana served as the summer residence of the Persian Achaemenid kings and the home of the royal mint. After the last Achaemenid king, Darius III, was defeated by Alexander the Macedon in 331 BCE, he fled to Ecbatana. In pursuing the Persian king, Alexander captured the city and plundered the imperial treasury.

Ruins of Ecbatana near present-day Hamadan in western Iran. Ecbatana served as the capital of the Median Empire. After the fall of the Median state, Ecbatana continued to serve as the summer capital during the Achaemenid and Parthian periods. (Egmont Strigl/imageBROKER/Corbis)

After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE and the division of his empire among his commanders, Media became part of the Seleucid Empire. Ecbatana was plundered on several occasions by the new rulers of Iran, including Seleucus I Nicator (r. 312–281 BCE), who followed the model set by Alexander and looted the city's gold and silver. Despite the looting, Ecbatana continued to serve as the home of the royal mint. The Arsacids, who overthrew the Seleucid rule in Iran, captured Ecbatana during the reign of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE). The campaigns of Antiochus VII in 130 BCE to restore Seleucid power in Iran fell short of recapturing Ecbatana. Continuing along the tradition set by the Achaemenid kings, the Arsacids used Ecbatana as their royal summer residence and as the home to the royal mint. As the Greek author Strabo wrote, "the Parthians continue to use this [Ecbatana] as a royal residence even now, and their kings spend at least their summers there, for Media is a cold country; but their winter residence is at Seleucia, on the Tigris near Babylon" (Strabo: 11.13.1–2). In 224 CE, Ardashir, the ruler of the district of Istakhr in southern Iran and a vassal of the Parthians, defeated the last Arsacid king, Artabanus IV, and established the Sasanian dynasty. Ecbatana, however, remained under Arsacid control until 226, when it was seized by Ardashir's army. It is not clear whether the Sasanian kings followed the tradition of the Achaemenids and the Arsacids by using Ecbatana as their summer capital. In 642, after the Sasanians were

defeated in the Battle of Nahavand, Ecbatana was captured by Arab Muslims. The city remained an important provincial capital during the Islamic era. Today, Hamedan serves as the capital of the Iranian province of the same name, with a population of nearly half a million people.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; Darius III; *K&Q, Median:* Astyages; Deioces; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Media, Medes, and the Median Empire

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Ganj Nameh

Ganj Nameh (meaning "Treasure Book") is located southwest of the city of Hamedan in western Iran. Ancient Hagmatana (Greek: Ecbatana; modern-day Hamedan) was the capital of the kingdom of Media as well as the summer capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. While Susa was the capital during winter and Persepolis provided a majestic site for major ceremonies, Ecbatana, because of its high elevation and cool and pleasant temperature, served as the summer capital. Ganj Nameh is home to two trilingual Achaemenid cuneiform inscriptions. The site takes its name from the fact that local natives believed that its inscriptions contained the secret code to a hidden treasure. Both inscriptions were carved in stone on a large granite rock above a creek that flows at the base of a hill in the foothills of Mount Alvand. The inscription on the upper-left corner of the rock dates from the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty.

The other inscription, below the first and on the lower right of the granite rock, is from the reign of the Persian Achaemenid king Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE). Both inscriptions are in three languages, namely Old Persian, Neo-Babylonian, and Neo-Elamite. Darius's inscription pays homage to the great god Ahura Mazda who created Earth, the sky, man, and happiness for man and made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many. Darius also refers to himself as the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing all kinds of men, king of the great Earth far and wide, and son of Vishtaspa (Hystaspes), an Achaemenian. The inscription of Xerxes I at Ganj Nameh has the exact content as that of Darius, the only difference being that the name of Darius has been replaced with that of Xerxes.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Ecbatana; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; *Achaemenid:* Xerxes I

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Ka'ba of Zoroaster

Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) is an ancient cubic-shaped building some 46 feet (14 meters) tall at Naqsh-e Rostam, located approximately 39 miles (63 kilometers) north of the city of Shiraz and 3.7 miles (6 kilometers) northwest of Persepolis in the southern Iranian province of Fars. Naqsh-e Rostam served as the royal necropolis, or burial site, for four kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty: Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE), Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE), and Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE). During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE), Naqsh-e Rostam emerged as an important center for royal and religious ceremonies. Several Sasanian rock reliefs are carved at the base of the cliff below the tombs of the Achaemenid kings.

The Ka'ba of Zoroaster faces the rock of Hossein Kuh, where the four Achaemenid royal tombs were cut into the cliff. The large cube-shaped tower stands to the west of the rock-cut tombs opposite the tomb of Darius II. The Ka'ba, which was probably built sometime during Achaemenid rule, contains a staircase and a door as well as blind windows in dark gray limestone on all four sides. No one knows with any certainty how the building acquired its name. It was certainly not a Zoroastrian temple or shrine, and there are no indications that pilgrims visited the site.

The function of this massive square building is unknown. Some scholars have maintained that the building was used as the site for royal coronations, while others have argued that it may have been used as a depository for religious records or significant materials belonging to the royal court. The possible use of the Ka'ba as a fire temple has been rejected because of the absence of a smoke outlet and because of the door, which was firmly closed. Today, most scholars consider the tower-shaped structure to be an Achaemenid royal tomb. The "high, massive foundation would make sense for the mausoleum of a Zoroastrian ruler, given that it would prevent the seeping of cadaveric poison into the soil" (Gropp: Ka'ba-ye Zardošt). Any burial chamber once present, however, was plundered long ago, and the chamber's doors were left standing open.

Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) at Naqsh-e Rostam in the southern Iranian province of Fars. The Ka'ba of Zoroaster, which is located near Persepolis, faces the rock of Hossein Kuh where the tombs of four Persian Achaemenid monarchs were cut into the cliff. (D. Bajurin/Dreamstime.com)

During the reign of the Sasanian monarch Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), three royal inscriptions in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek were incised into the three walls of the building. The only wall without an inscription is the northern or entrance wall. Below the Sasanian king's inscription, the powerful and influential Zoroastrian high priest Kartir added his own inscription. Shapur's inscription provides the reader with the royal lineage of the Sasanian monarch, the countries he ruled, and the victories he achieved over three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian.

Shapur I called himself "the Mazda worshipping lord, king of kings of Iran and non-Iran (*Aneran*), whose lineage is from the Gods, son of the Mazda worshipping divinity Ardashir, king of kings of Iran, whose lineage is from the Gods, grandson of king Papak" (Frye: 371). He also listed the countries he ruled as "Persis, Parthia, Khuzistan, Mesene, Assyria, Adiabene, Arabia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Segan [Makhelonia = Mingrelia], Arran [Albania] Balasakan, up to the Caucasus mountains and the Gates of Albania, and all of the mountain chain of Pareshwar, Media, Gurgan, Merv, Herat and all of Aparshahr, Kerman, Seistan, Turan, Makuran, Paradene, Hindustan [Sind], the Kushanshahr up to Peshawar, and up to Kashgar, Sogdiana and to the mountains of Tashkent, and on the other side of the sea, Oman" (Frye: 371).

Shapur then described his campaigns against three Roman

emperors:

> At first we had become established in the empire, Gordian Caesar raised in all of the Roman Empire a force from the Goth and German realms and marched on Babylonia [Assyria] (Asuristan) against the Empire of Iran and against us. On the border of Babylonia at Misikhe, a great "frontal" battle occurred. Gordian Caesar was killed and the Roman force was destroyed. And the Romans made Philip Caesar. Then Philip Caesar came to us for terms, and to ransom their lives, gave us 500,000 denars, and became tributary to us. And for this reason we have renamed Misikhe Peroz-Shapur. And Caesar lied again and did wrong to Armenia. Then we attacked the Roman Empire and annihilated at Barbalissos a Roman force of 60,000 and Syria and the environs of Syria we burned, ruined and pillaged all. In this one campaign we conquered of the Roman Empire fortresses and towns. … In the third campaign, when we attacked Carrhae and Urhai [Edessa] and were besieging Carrhae and Edessa Valerian Caesar marched against us. He had with him a force of 70,000 from Germany, Raetia, Noricum, Dacia, Pannonia, Moesia, Istria, Spain, Africa, Thrace, Bithynia, Asia, Pamphylia, Isauria, Lycaonia, Galatia, Lycia, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Syria, Phoenicia, Judaea, Arabia, Mauritania, Germania, Rhodes [Lydia], Osrhoene, Mesopotamia. And beyond Carrhae and Edessa we had a great battle with Valerian Caesar. We made prisoner ourselves with our own hands Valerian Caesar and the others, chiefs of that army, the praetorian prefect, senators; we made all prisoners and deported them to Persis. And Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia we burned, ruined and pillaged. In that campaign we conquered of the Roman Empire the town of Samosata, Alexandria on the Issus, Katabolos, Aegaea, Mopsuestia, Mallos, Adana, Tarsus, Augustinia, 13. Zephyrion, Sebaste, Korykos Anazarba ([Agrippas]), Kastabala, Neronias, Flavias, Nicopolis, Epiphaneia, 14. Kelenderis, Anemurion, Selinus, Mzdu-[Myonpolis], Antioch, Seleucia, Dometiopolis, Tyana, Caesarea [Meiakariri], Komana Kybistra, Sebasteia, Birtha, Rakundia, Laranda, Iconium, altogether all these cities with their surroundings. And men of the Roman Empire, of non-Iranians, we deported. We settled them in the Empire of Iran in Persis, Parthia, Khuzistan, in Babylonia and in other lands where there were domains of our father, grandfathers and of our ancestors. (Frye: 371–372)

Ka'ba-ye Zardosht was systematically described in 1970 by Erich F. Schmid, an archaeologist from the University of Chicago, and subsequently was studied by the British archaeologist David Stronach

in 1978.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur I; *Prophets:* Kartir; Primary Documents: Document 32

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Kangavar and the Temple of Anahita (Anahid)

Kangavar, a town in western Iran, is located on the highway linking Central Asia and Iran to Mesopotamia. Today as in ancient times, Kangavar sits on the road that connects Hamedan (ancient Hagmatana or Ecbatana) to Kermanshah. Kangavar served as an important commercial and religious center along the famed Silk Road. Over the centuries, this well-established route allowed the transport of valuable goods from East Asia, Central Asia, and Iran to Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Rome. The town of Kangavar is also renowned as home to an ancient structure known as the Temple of Anahita (Anahid). Anahita was the ancient Iranian goddess of waters. The identification of the Kangavar structure as a temple of Anahita is based on a statement

made by the first-century BCE author Isidore of Charax. In his short geographical account titled *Parthian Stations,* Isidore referred to Kangavar as Concobar and identified the city as home to a temple of Anaitis (Anahita). He did not, however, mention the exact date of the temple's construction.

The excavations conducted by Iranian archaeologists since 1968 have called into question the identification of the building site as a temple. There is no consensus among the archaeologists and scholars of ancient Iran about the date for the construction of the ancient structure in Kangavar. Some have argued that the original platform was built sometime during the Achaemenid period (550–330 BCE) and later used by succeeding dynasties to build new structures or rebuild some of the existing ones. Others have maintained that the building, which displays Hellenistic influences, was constructed during the reign of the Seleucids, who established their rule over Iran after 305 BCE. Still other scholars have asserted that the structure has the hallmarks of Parthian architecture and was most probably built during the long reign of the Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE). The most recent scholarship has rejected all of the above-mentioned theories, arguing instead that the structure was most probably built sometime during the Sasanian period (224–651 CE).

In the 1840s when the English traveler, archaeologist, and diplomat Sir Henry Layard (1817–1894) visited Kangavar, eight columns on the platform remained standing. Throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries the structure was significantly damaged by local inhabitants, who used its stone blocks to build their homes. To protect the structure from further destruction and to excavate the area surrounding the foundation platform, the Iranian government purchased a section of the village and resettled some of the villagers who lived in close proximity to the site. Starting in 1968, a team of Iranian archaeologists directed by Seyfullah Kambakhsh Fard began to excavate the ancient site at Kangavar. This team unearthed a Parthian burial ground outside the walls of the building; fragments of Parthian, Sasanian, and Islamic pottery; a mosque dating back to the Mongol Il-Khanid period (1256–1353); and a shrine from the reign of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722).

See also: *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire; *Religion:* Anahita

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Kuh-e Khwaja (Mount of Khwaja)

A black basalt mountain and a major historical, religious, and archaeological site located on an island in Lake Hamun, 19 miles (30 kilometers) southwest of the city of Zabol in the northeastern part of the province of Sistan-Baluchistan, near the Iranian–Afghan border. During the Achaemenid period, the region surrounding Lake Hamun and the Helmand River lay within the territory of the Iranian province of Drangiana (i.e., Zranka/Dranka), which is mentioned in the inscription of Darius I at Bisotun in western Iran near the city of Kermanshah (Schmitt: 1). The word "Zranka" or "Zarang" (meaning "mountain peak") may have been a reference to the Kuh-e Khwaja (Mount of Khwaja), which was the most important hallmark of the province. The Arsacid monarch Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE) incorporated the province into the Parthian Empire during his reign. The province became the home of the Saka (Scythian) nomadic groups who settled there from Central Asia. The name "Sistan" is believed to have derived from Sakastan, or the land of the Sakas.

Kuh-e Khwaja rises out of the marshes of Lake Hamun and is considered one of the most important historical landmarks of Sistan-Baluchistan and eastern Iran. The main archaeological remains of Kuh-e Khwaja are situated on the southeastern section of a high hill overlooking the marshes of Lake Hamun. This hill rises out of the lake and for most of the year is an island. The sole access to the upper slopes of this hill is through a narrow path, which zigzags through the ruins of the ancient town on the lower slope.

The major archaeological complex consists of several buildings and fortifications, which include ruins of courtyards, gates, towers, and rooms. Numerous rooms were richly decorated with stucco ornaments and above all with colorful frescoes showing Iranian, Indian, and Greco-Roman stylistic elements and representing religious and secular motifs. The most important archaeological site of Kuh-e Khwaja is the ruins of a walled citadel and a building complex known as Ghagha-shahr, "a complex structure consisting of a maze of courts and rooms built of mud brick," which sits on the mountain's southeast end (Kawami: 13). The building complex contains one of the only surviving Zoroastrian fire temples within a major monument from the pre-Islamic era. The temple is located on a terrace beyond high walls.

As a structural complex with an intriguing range of Zoroastrian associations, Kuh-e Khwaja represents a unique repository of still inadequately documented architectural information, especially with reference to the transition from Sasanian to Islamic architectural forms. In addition, the site was decorated with large murals depicting various figurative motifs and mud reliefs of human and equestrian figures. Several of these surviving pieces are housed in various museums such as Iran-e Bastan Museum in Tehran, New Delhi Museum, Berlin Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Farther up the hill and beyond the fortifications on top of the plateau, various unrelated structures probably of the Islamic era remain. The function of these structures has not been determined.

The date for the construction of the Ghaga-shahr complex is unknown. The analysis of the wall paintings has not produced an exact or even approximate dating. Scholars "have suggested dates that range from the Achaemenid to the Seleucid, Parthian, Sasanian and early Islamic period" (De Waele: 1). The first Western scholar to study Kuh-e Khwaja was the Hungarian-born British archaeologist Aurel Stein, who visited the site in December 1915 (Kawami: 13). Stein "mapped the large complex, photographed the painted decorations that remained in some rooms, and removed many of the wall paintings, which were sent to the National Museum in New Delhi, where they remain" (Kawami: 13). Stein "first published his discoveries in 1916, but full documentation had to wait until 1928, with the publication of his work *Innermost Asia*" (Kawami: 13).

The second Western scholar to study Kuh-e Khwaja was the German orientalist Ernst Herzfeld, who visited the site in February 1925 and returned with a small crew in 1929 to spend February and March measuring and mapping the rooms and removing the wall paintings he found. These paintings were transported to Berlin, but no one is certain of their fate, and today they are viewed as lost and beyond recovery. Two small fragments of the wall paintings, which

had remained in Herzfeld's possession, were later purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Kawami: 14).

The building complex that included wall paintings, stucco reliefs, and a Zoroastrian fire temple could not be accurately dated. Stein believed that the citadel and the temple housed within it were built during the reign of the Arsacid dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE). Initially Herzfeld dated the palace complex and the citadel to the first century CE, which falls into the Arsacid era. However, he modified his estimate and identified two separate phases for the complex, the first dating back to the Sasanian period and the second to the early Islamic era. In 1960–1961, an Italian archaeological team headed by Giorgio Gullini visited Kuh-e Khwaja and reported the loss of more archaeological evidence as a result of weather. Gullini identified six separate levels, starting with an Achaemenid phase, then an early Parthian level from approximately the middle of the second century BCE, two phases from the Sasanian period, and finally an early Islamic level, and another and a far more recent Islamic phase, which dates to the 15th century (Kawami: 15). In 1975–1976, a second Italian archaeological group discovered a new wall painting fragment.

After the fall of the Sasanian dynasty in the middle of the seventh century CE and the conversion of the majority of the population to Islam, Kuh-e Khwaja remained a destination for pilgrims. Muslim tombs on the top of the rocky ridge indicate that the site was visited by those who paid homage to the island as a holy place. Travelers and pilgrims continued to visit the mountain as late as the 20th century, and some celebrated the arrival of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, on the island.

See also: *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Naqsh-e Rajab

Naqsh-e Rajab (Picture of Rajab), at the foot of Mount Hossein, is an important historical and archaeological site located amid other significant sites in the southern Iranian province of Fars. Its location on the Shiraz–Isfahan road, 7.4 miles (12 kilometers) from Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, also places it less than half a mile (1 kilometer) from another archaeological site, Naqsh-e Rostam, where the tombs of four Achaemenid kings, Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II, as well as Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) and several rock reliefs from the early Sasanian period are located.

Naqsh-e Rajab itself is home to four large rock reliefs carved onto the site's limestone cliffs and dating back to the first century of Sasanian rule. One rock relief depicts the investiture of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. The great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) hands the diadem of royalty to the Sasanian king, while six onlookers stand at attention observing the elaborate ceremony. Ardashir founded the Sasanian dynasty after he revolted against Artabanus IV, the last king of the Arsacid monarchy. After he defeated and killed Artabanus on the battlefield, Ardashir imposed his rule over the former provinces and tributaries of the Arsacid Empire. He also proclaimed himself the king of kings. It was under Ardashir and his successors that Zoroastrianism was established as the state religion of the Sasanian Empire.

The archaeological site of Naqsh-e Rajab, a short distance from Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis in the southern Iranian province of Fars, contains four inscriptions and rock-cut bas reliefs dating to the early Sasanian period. (Manca Juvan/In Pictures/Corbis)

The second rock relief celebrates the investiture of Ardashir's son and successor, Shapur I, and shows the Sasanian king of kings receiving the diadem of sovereignty from Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda), who, like the king, is seated on horseback. Shapur was designated as co-regent by his father while Ardashir was still alive. Shapur's reign witnessed the expansion and consolidation of the empire his father had founded. By the end of Shapur's reign, the Sasanian domains extended from Central Asia to the Euphrates River. Both Naqsh-e Rajab and the nearby Naqsh-e Rostam seem to have played an important role in Shapur's celebration of his power and accomplishments. A rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam shows the captured Roman emperor Valerian kneeling in front of Shapur, who is seated on his horse. On the walls of the tower-shaped Ka'ba-ye Zardosht, Shapur left a long and highly detailed inscription that recounts his victories over three Roman emperors and lists the provinces that had submitted to his rule.

The third carving, a polished surface relief, depicts Shapur I and his followers celebrating his triumph over the Roman emperors Philip the Arab and Valerian. During his long reign, Shapur I had to either fight or negotiate with three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. He was victorious in most of his campaigns against the Romans. Gordian was killed either in battle against Shapur or by his own generals shortly after the conclusion of a battle with the Persian king. Philip the Arab, who succeeded Gordian, agreed to pay a large war indemnity to Shapur, and Valerian, who had marched against Shapur, was captured by the Persian monarch and brought back to Fars, the birthplace of the Sasanian dynasty, as a prisoner of war.

The fourth relief at Naqsh-e Rajab belongs to Kartir (Karder), the powerful high priest of the Zoroastrian religious establishment who rose to prominence during the reigns of the Sasanian kings Shapur I, Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II. Kartir's sway, sufficient to have his own bas-relief and inscription next to those of the first two kings of the Sasanian dynasty, reflects the growing power and interference of the Zoroastrian religious leadership in the political and cultural life of the Sasanian state. Kartir appears on several Sasanian rock reliefs. He also left several inscriptions of his own, which were carved next to rock reliefs depicting significant important ceremonies or victories. These inscriptions are of great importance to historians, linguists, and scholars of Zoroastrianism. The inscriptions shed light on the

teachings of Zoroastrianism during the early Sasanian period and have also been used by scholars to study the grammar and structure of Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian dynasty.

Kartir's inscription at Naqsh-e Rajab is located next to a rock relief depicting the investiture of Ardashir I. Another inscription of Kartir is located at Naqsh-e Rostam next to a relief of Shapur I. A second inscription of Kartir at Naqsh-e Rostam is located below an inscription of Shapur I on the outer walls of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht. A fourth inscription of Kartir is at Sar Mashhad, a village in Fars province 136 miles from the city of Shiraz. This inscription is next to a rock relief, which depicts the Sasanian king of kings Bahram II killing two lions as he holds the hand of his queen. Kartir and a prince of the royal family, most probably the crown prince Bahram III, stand behind the king, watching the royal hunt. The Sasanian king of kings Narseh I also mentions Kartir in his inscription at Paikuli in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In his inscriptions, Kartir describes his rise to power as well as his services as a dedicated and devoted champion of Zoroastrianism. He rose to power and prominence during the reign of Shapur I and was promoted to higher and more prestigious posts by Shapur's successors, Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II. Hormozd I granted Kartir greater power and authority as well as the insignia of high office, represented by a hat and a belt. Bahram II conferred upon Kartir the rank of court grandee and appointed him as the chief priest and judge of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian monarch also made Kartir the "master of custom at the fires of Anahid-Ardashir and Anahid, the Lady at Istakhr," the birthplace of the Sasanian dynasty in Fars province (Skærvø: Kartir). With strong support from his royal patron, Kartir played a central role in propagating Zoroastrianism, supporting Zoroastrian priests, and suppressing non-Zoroastrian communities, including Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Manicheans. He also played a critical role in the persecution of the prophet Mani (216–276 CE) and his followers. Mani was ordered by Bahram I to present himself at the royal court, where he was questioned, denounced, and imprisoned. Kartir accumulated such immense power that he played an important role in removing the young king Bahram III from the throne and inviting his great-uncle Narseh, who at the time served as the ruler of Armenia, to travel to the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, and assume the reins of power. The inscription devoted to Kartir on the limestone cliffs of Naqsh-e Rajab was designed to portray the Zoroastrian high priest as a truthful, devout, and ethical man who had lived in accordance with the teachings of his religion.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; Shapur I; *Prophets:* Kartir

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Naqsh-e Rostam

Naqsh-e Rostam (Picture of Rostam) is an important site containing four royal tombs and one massive cubic-shaped structure dating back to the reign of the Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE), as well as eight large rock reliefs from the Sasanian period (r. 224–651 CE). Naqsh-e Rostam partially served as the royal necropolis, or burial site, for four kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty: Darius I the Great (522–486 BCE), Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), Artaxerxes I (465–424 BCE), and Darius II (423–404 BCE). The site is located approximately 39 miles (63 kilometers) north of the city of Shiraz in the southern Iranian province of Fars and 3.7 miles (6 kilometers) northwest of Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid dynasty.

The site of Naqsh-e Rostam contains a tall, impressive, and towering cliff. The ancient Elamites who inhabited southwestern Iran in antiquity considered it to be a holy site. The resting places of the four Achaemenid kings mentioned above were designed as cross-shaped tombs cut into the rock. A door in the center of the facade provided access to the interior of each royal tomb. The only tomb identified by an inscription is that of Darius I. Above the door of Darius's tomb, 30 representatives of the peoples of the empire are depicted holding a dais, or throne bench, on their hands. Darius I stands before a fire altar on a three-step platform that rests on the throne bench. The king wears a crown. His left hand rests on a bow, and his right hand is extended in a posture of worship and devotion toward a winged figure, which has the head and torso of a man and stands over and between the king and the fire altar. Some scholars have identified this figure as a representation of the great god Ahura Mazda. Aside from Ahura Mazda, the king, the fire altar, and the 30 bearers of the royal dais, several other figures are featured. These

include the close friend and confidant of the king, Gaubaruva (Gobryas), who served as the royal lance bearer; the keeper of the king's battle-ax, Aspachina (Aspathines); several members of the royal family; court dignitaries; and imperial guards.

Rock relief of the Roman emperor Valerian kneeling before the Persian Sasanian monarch Shapur I, at Naqsh-e Rostam in the southern Iranian province of Fars. (Steve Estvanik/Dreamstime.com)

A large cube-shaped building called Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) stands across from the rock-cut tombs. It was probably built sometime during the Achaemenid period and contains a staircase and a door as well as blind windows in dark gray limestone on all four sides. The function of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht is unknown. Some scholars have maintained that the building was used as a site for royal coronations, while others have argued that it may have been used as a depository for religious or governmental records. During the reign of the Sasanian monarch Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), three royal inscriptions in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek were incised into the three walls of the building. The only wall without an inscription is the northern, or entrance, wall. Below the Middle Persian inscription, the powerful and influential Zoroastrian high priest Kartir (Karder) added his own inscription.

During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (224–651 CE), Naqsh-e Rostam emerged as an important center for royal and religious ceremonies. Eight Sasanian rock reliefs are carved at the base of the cliff below the tombs of the Achaemenid kings. The most impressive of these is the victory relief of the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I.

The Persian monarch is sitting on a horse, while the captured Roman emperor Valerian kneels before him. Two other Roman figures appear on the relief. The first, believed by many to be Emperor Gordian III, has fallen and died next to the majestic horse of the Persian king; the second Roman figure, identified by some as Emperor Philip the Arab and by others as Emperor Valerian, stands next to Shapur with his hand held by the Sasanian king of kings. Another impressive rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam depicts the investiture of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. It shows the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) bestowing the diadem of kingship upon Ardashir I, thus implying Ardashir's divine origins.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rajab; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur I; *Prophets:* Kartir; Primary Documents: Document 10; Document 32

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Nisa

One of the most important historical and archaeological sites of ancient Iran dating back to the reign of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE). There is no consensus among archaeologists who have excavated Nisa about the function of the site

and its numerous buildings. Nisa has been described as one of the capital cities of the Arsacid dynasty, a “sacred fortress of the Parthian kings,” a royal residence of Parthian monarchs, or even a “Parthian dynastic or general religious center” (Pilipko: 114). Nisa is located near the village of Bagir, 6 miles (10 kilometers) west of Ashgabat, the capital of the Republic of Turkmenistan. The “fortified site of Staraia (Old) Nisa is situated on the southeastern fringe of Bagir, while Novaia (New) Nisa is on the southwestern fringe. The distance between the two sites is 1.5 kilometers” (Pilipko: 114).

The Arsacids were originally members of the Aparni or Parni, a Scythian group within the Dahae confederation that moved south from Central Asia into the region immediately to the east and the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea and then to northeastern Iran. In the first half of the third century BCE, the cradle of the Arsacid dynasty was the territory of southern Turkmenistan, particularly “the northern part of Dehistan in the area of the river Uzboj” (Lecomte: 144). By 250 BCE, the Parni had established themselves on the shores of the Atrek River. A short time later in 247 BCE, a leader of the Parni, Arsaces (Arshak), was crowned as king in Asaac. The exact location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). Sometime between 245 and 239 BCE, the Seleucid governors of Parthia and Bactria, Andragoras and Diodotus, respectively, revolted and declared their independence from the Seleucid state. A short time later in 238 BCE, Arsaces took advantage of the chaos in the eastern provinces of the Seleucid Empire and invaded and conquered Parthia. Andragoras, the governor of Parthia, was killed, and his satrapy emerged as the new home and operational base for Arsaces I. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used to refer to them and their empire. Beginning in the reign of Phraates I, the Arsacids broke out of Parthia and established a foothold south of the Alborz mountain range. When Phraates I died, his brother Mithridates I continued Phraates’s policy and expanded the Arsacid domain to Media in western Iran and Babylonia in present-day southern Iraq, laying the foundation for an empire that would rule until 224 CE.

Ruins of ancient Nisa, one of the most important ceremonial centers of the Parthian/ Arsacid dynasty. Nisa is situated a short distance from Ashgabat (Eshqabad), the capital of present-day Turkmenistan. (Lola Aykutoglu/Dreamstime.com)

In his *Parthian Stations,* which provides a short account of overland trade routes between the Levant and India in the first century BCE, Isidore of Charax wrote that after departing Hyrcania (Gorgan) in northern Iran, the traveler reaches Astauena "in which there are 12 villages in which there are stations; and the city of Asaak, in which Arsaces," the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, "was first proclaimed king; and an everlasting fire" was "guarded there" (Isidore of Charax: 4). Isidore of Charax also wrote that beyond this district was Parthyena, within which is a valley and the city of Parthaunisa, where there are royal tombs. For decades, there was a debate among historians and archaeologists about the exact location of Asaac and Parthaunisa. Parthaunisa was believed by many scholars to be not only the first capital of the Arsacid dynasty but also its religious and spiritual heart. Beginning in 1930, Soviet archaeologists A. A. Marushchenko and A. S. Bashkirov began to conduct scientific investigation on the site of Nisa, located near Ashgabat, the capital of the then Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan. Marushchenko became convinced that the ruins of Bagir were indeed the Parthaunisa described by Isidore of Charax (Pilipko: 101). The most important find of this initial investigation was a large building with a square-shaped hall that was identified as a mausoleum of Arsacid kings (Pilipko: 101). A more systematic excavation of the site was conducted after World War II by the Soviet archaeologist M. E. Masson. This excavation continued for several decades and resulted in major discoveries (Pilipko: 103). Among the first discoveries were a large

square building, which probably served as a royal treasury and was "perhaps associated with the funeral cult of Parthian kings"; over "thirty silver coins of Seleucid, Bactrian, Parthian, Sogdian, and even Pontic origins"; and a "wine storehouse consisting of large rectangular rooms filled with rows of clay jars, where excavations revealed 2,751 ostraca with Parthian inscriptions that were primarily records reflecting the activity of the storehouse" (Pilipko: 103). A new period of excavations began in 1979 under the direction of V. N. Pilipko, followed by a second team from the Leningrad Section of the Institute of Archaeology headed by V. M. Masson. In 1992–1994, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, an Italian team led by Antonio Invernizzi conducted further excavations at Nisa.

The site at Nisa contained a town as well as a citadel and a royal city with numerous buildings. These buildings included palaces, reception halls, temples, and a royal mausoleum where the Arsacid kings were buried. According to the Soviet archaeologist Vladimir G. Lukonin, "Parthian Nisa consisted of three main parts—a citadel covering more than 10 acres, pentagonal in plan, built on a natural crag; the town proper; and the urban precinct surrounded by a defensive wall" (Lukonin: 44, 61). Near the town of Nisa was "the fortress of Mihrdatkart [presumably named after King Mithridates I of the Arsacid dynasty], the 'royal city' with the burial-place and the treasury of the Parthian kings" (Lukonin: 61). There were several temples in the city of Nisa. These temples, which were dedicated to the cult of ancestors, contained niches in the upper parts of their walls in which clay statues of Parthian kings and gods were displayed (Lukonin: 61). The masterpieces of Parthian art, however, were its exquisite rhytons. Rhytons were "horn-shaped" "vessels made from elephants' tusks," which could at times be "20 inches high, decorated with protomes of centaurs and griffins, the torso of a naked goddess, etc." (Lukonin: 61). Aside from these masterful pieces of art, Soviet archaeologists also unearthed administrative documents related to a wine store (Lukonin: 62).

If Nisa or Mihrdatkart served as the first capital of the Arsacid dynasty, it did not remain so for very long. Vulnerable to nomadic attacks from Central Asia, the Parthians moved their capital first to Shahr-i Qumis (Hecatompylos or Sad Darvazeh) near Damghan (213 miles east of Tehran) in northern Iran, then to Seleucia-on-Tigris in southern Iraq, and later to Ctesiphon, which they built on the opposite bank of the Tigris across from Seleucia. Mithridates I, who converted the Arsacid state from a small kingdom confined to northeastern Iran to a powerful state and a recognized world power, ascended the Parthian throne in Seleucia-on-Tigris rather than in Nisa, although he and many of the future Arsacid monarchs most probably returned to

Nisa, and many of them were buried at its royal mausoleum.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Mithridates I; *Peoples:* Arsacids; Parthian Stations

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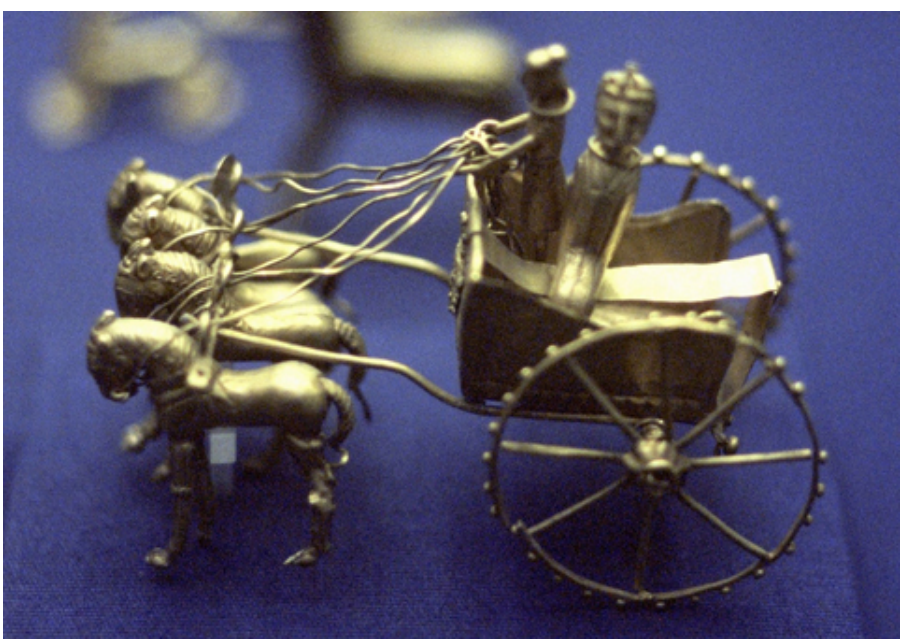
Oxus Treasure

A collection of about 180 gold and silver objects dating back to the reign of the Persian Achaemenid Empire (r. 550–330 BCE). The pieces, which are considered the most important surviving collection of ancient Persian metalwork, include seals, plaques, rings, armlets, vessels, model chariots and figures, personal objects, and coins ranging in date from the early fifth century to the early second century BCE (Curtis: 65). The pieces were discovered on the upper banks of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) sometime between 1877 and 1880. The Oxus originates in the Pamirs and, after forming part of the border between Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, travels in a northwesterly direction to reach the Aral Sea.

THE TWO GREAT RIVERS OF CENTRAL ASIA: OXUS (AMU DARYA) AND JAXARTES (SYR DARYA)

Central Asia has many rivers, but in the writings of classical authors, the two most well-known rivers were the Oxus and the Jaxartes. The Oxus is approximately 1,553 miles (2,500 kilometers) long. The name of the river in Middle Persian was Wehrōd. The Muslim Arabs who conquered Central Asia in the eighth century CE called the river Jeyhun. The region north of the Oxus and south of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) was called Transoxiana (the land beyond the Oxus). The Arab Muslims called this region Mawara' al-Nahr, or "the land beyond the river." Amu Darya is the Persian name for the river. Originating in the Pamir Mountains in the southeastern corner of Central Asia, the Amu Darya is formed by the convergence of several rivers, including the Panj and Vakhsh. Today, the Amu Darya forms a section of the border between Afghanistan and the two Central Asian republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as a portion of the border between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan before flowing northwest to reach the Aral Sea.

The second major river, the Jaxartes, is approximately 1,374 miles (2,212 kilometer) long. In Persian the name of Jaxartes is Syr Darya, which derives from Old Persian, Yakhsha Arta. The Arab Muslims who conquered Central Asia in the eighth century CE called the river Seyhun. The Jaxartes is formed by the confluence of the Naryn and Qoradarya Rivers in the eastern Farghaneh Valley. The river moves in a northwesterly direction through present-day Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and southern Kazakhstan before it empties into the Aral Sea. For centuries the region of Transoxiana, lying between the Oxus River (Amu Darya) to the south and the Jaxartes to the north, was a major center of Iranian culture and civilization.



Gold chariot from the Oxus Treasure, the most important surviving collection of gold and silver metalwork, including 200 coins, from the Persian Achaemenid

period. (Jupiterimages)

The treasure was discovered by local villagers, who sold their finds to a group of three merchants from Bokhara. Afterward the merchants were attacked and robbed as they were traveling from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, to Peshawar in northwestern India (present-day Pakistan). When notified of the ambush, Captain F. C. Burton, a British officer working in Afghanistan, caught up with the robbers and forced them to return a large part of the treasure to the merchants. The merchants agreed to sell Burton a gold armlet, which was eventually "acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum" in London (Curtis: 60). The merchants sold the remainder of the treasure in the bazaars of Rawalpindi. A portion of the treasure was purchased from the local dealers by Major General Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893), the director general of the Archaeological Survey of India, who sold the gold and silver objects to "Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, who on his death in 1897 bequeathed them to the British Museum" (Curtis: 60).

See also: *Ancient Provinces:* Bactria; Transoxiana; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire

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Panjkand

Panjkand (Panjakent) was a major urban and commercial center of Sogdiana (Sogd), an Iranian-speaking region, that extended from the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in the south to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in the north, with its central region located in the Zarafshan and Kashka Darya River Valleys in present-day Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. The city, located 37 miles (60 kilometers) east of Samarqand, came into existence sometime in the fifth century CE but was destroyed by Arab Muslims in 780. Panjkand served as the commercial heart of the Silk Road for nearly 400 years and included Zoroastrian, Hindu, Jewish, and Christian communities. The Sogdian merchants of Panjkand who traded with China, Persia, and Rome displayed a high level of tolerance for various religious traditions whose adherents traveled along the Silk Road. Liberality toward various religious communities was interwoven with a deep curiosity about cultures beyond Central Asia and was reflected in Sogdian art, which borrowed heavily from Persian, Greek, Indian, and Chinese motifs and designs. The scenes of fighting, hunting, and feasting in

particular remind us of the Iranian tradition of *razm-u bazm* (warfare and feasting), which was brilliantly depicted by the Persian poets of the Islamic era and, in particular, the greatest of all Persian epic poets, Ferdowsi. The tolerant attitude toward religious diversity did not change as the Sogd region came under Hephthalite rule in the fifth century CE and then passed on to the Western Turk Empire. Thus, Buddhism, Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism, and various cults such as the cult of the goddess Nanaia coexisted with Zoroastrianism. A significant number of painted scenes depicting the worship of various gods, dating from between the sixth and eighth centuries, have been unearthed in the temples, palaces, and dwellings of Panjkand.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Samarqand; *Ancient Provinces:* Sogdiana

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Pasargadae

Located nearly 19 miles (30 kilometers) from the ceremonial Persian Achaemenid capital of Persepolis and 56 miles (90 kilometers) from the city of Shiraz, the capital of the southern Iranian province of Fars, Pasargadae is one of the most important historical and archaeological sites of ancient Iran. Pasargadae served as the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire during the reign of Cyrus II the Great (r. 558–530 BCE). According to several classical authors, Pasargadae was chosen as the first residence of Cyrus because it was the site of his last and decisive battle against the Medes. As the geographer Strabo wrote, "Cyrus held Pasargadae in honor because he there conquered Astyages the Mede in his last battle, transferred to himself the empire of Asia, and constructed a palace as a memorial to his victory" (Strabo: 15.3.8). It was after this victory that he marched north and captured Hagmatana or Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan), the Median capital in today's western Iran. The origins and the meaning of the word

“Pasargadae” are uncertain. The Greek writer Herodotus noted that the Persian nation contained a number of tribes; he claimed that one of the groups persuaded by Cyrus to revolt against the Median king, Astyages, were the Pasargadaes (Herodotus: 1.125). On the Achaemenid fortification tablets discovered at Persepolis, there are references to Batrakata or Batrakatash, which may have been the Elamite name for Pasargadae.

Pasargadae also houses the simple but majestic tomb of Cyrus, who died in battle in Central Asia in 530 BCE. The tomb of Cyrus was identified through a cuneiform inscription that reads “I, Cyrus, the King, an Achaemenid.” The earliest archaeological work on Pasargadae dated the inscription to the reign of Cyrus. More recent studies have, however, maintained that all the inscriptions at Pasargadae were incised after the death of Cyrus, most probably during the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486). Arrian wrote that

Tomb of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, at Pasargadae in the southern Iranian province of Fars. Situated in the fertile Dasht-e Morghab (Murghab), Pasargadae was the first capital founded by Cyrus, as well as his final resting place. (Suronin/Dreamstime.com)

> the tomb of Cyrus was in the royal park at Pasargadae; a grove of various sorts of trees had been planted round it; there were streams of running water and a meadow with lush grass. The base of the monument was rectangular, built of stone slabs cut square, and on top was a roof chamber, also built of stone, with access through a door so narrow that only one man at a time—and a little one at that—could manage, with great difficulty, painfully to

> squeeze himself through. Inside the chamber there was a golden coffin containing Cyrus's body, and a great divan with feet of hammered gold, spread with covers of some thick, brightly coloured material, with a Babylonian rug on top. Tunics and *candyes*—or Median jackets—of Babylonian workmanship were laid out on the divan, and (Aristobulus says) Median trousers, various robes dyed in amethyst, purple, and many other colours, necklaces, scimitars, and inlaid earrings of gold and precious stones. A table stood by it, and in the middle of it lay the coffin which held Cyrus' body. Within the enclosure, by the way which led up to the tomb, a small building had been constructed for the Magi who guarded it, a duty which had been handed down from father to son ever since the time of Cyrus's son, Cambyses. They had a grant from the King of a sheep a day, with an allowance of meal and wine, and one horse a month to sacrifice to Cyrus. There was an inscription on the tomb in Persian, signifying: "O man, I am Cyrus son of Cambyses, who founded the empire of Persia and ruled over Asia. Do not grudge me my monument." (Arrian: 6:29)

Aside from the tomb of Cyrus, Pasargadae contained a variety of buildings, including palaces, pavilions, fire altars, gardens, and a large park. According to David Stronach, "the plan of the Pasargadae palaces marks one of the true revolutions in ancient Near Eastern architectural history in as much as a single-focal axis, such as had dominated monumental architectural traditions in the Near East for millennia, gives way to a truly open, symmetric four-sided structure with no principal axis and no fixed focal point" (Stronach and Gopnik: Pasargadae). One of the important structures in Pasargadae was Zendan-e Soleyman (Prison of Solomon), a stone tower built on the plain next to the river Polvar. The exact function of this building is uncertain. However, some scholars have maintained that Zendan housed the Achaemenid royal insignia, which included the "royal garments and shoes; the upright purple tiara; the scepter in his right hand and the lotus blossom in his left; lance and bow" (Wiesehöfer: 32). They have also suggested that the royal investiture during the reign of Persia's Achaemenid kings probably took place on the roof of Zendan-e Soleyman (Wiesehöfer: 32). Even after the death of Cyrus and the transfer of the capital from Pasargadae to Susa, Ecbatana, and Persepolis, the Achaemenid kings returned to Pasargadae as the site for their royal investiture. According to the Greek author Plutarch, after the death of Darius II in 405 BCE, Artaxerxes II, Darius's oldest son and successor, went to Pasargadae "to have the ceremony of his inauguration consummated by the Persian priests" (Plutarch: 2:704). Plutarch also wrote that in Pasargadae there was "a temple dedicated

to a warlike goddess, whom one might liken to Minerva, into which when the royal person to be initiated has passed, he must strip himself of his own robe, and put on that which Cyrus the first wore before he was king; then, having devoured a frail of figs, he must eat turpentine, and drink a cup of sour milk" (Plutarch: 2:704). Once the investiture ceremony was completed, "the new king then had to perform a series of symbolic acts (acceptance of the official seal, confirmation of privileges, confirmation or new conferment of offices and functions), thereby assuming his 'official duties'" (Wiesehöfer: 32).

Pasargadae was excavated for the first time by Ernst Herzfeld, originally in 1923 and again in 1928. In 1933, the Hungarian-born British orientalist Aurel Stein mapped out a part of the site. In 1949, the Iranian archaeologist Ali Sami conducted an excavation that lasted for six years. From 1961 to 1963, David Stronach excavated the site on behalf of the British Institute of Persian Studies.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Persepolis; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; *Religion:* Magi

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Persepolis

Called Takht-e Jamshid (Throne of Jamshid) in Persian, Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty beginning with the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE). The name of the site was coined by the ancient Greeks, who referred to the region of Parsa as Persis and the royal city of the Persian king as "Persai polis" or "city in Persis."

Persepolis is located on the plain of Marvdasht, 35.4 miles (57 kilometers) northwest of the present-day city of Shiraz in the southern Iranian province of Fars. In 518 BCE, four years after he had seized the reins of power, Darius I embarked on an ambitious project to build

a new palace complex at the foot of the mountains east of the plain of Marvdasht. According to the Iranian scholar A. Shapur Shahbazi, the name of this mountain was originally Kuh-e Mehr (Mount of Mithra) but was changed in the 13th century to Kuh-e Rahmat (Mount of Mercy). Based on this assertion, Shahbazi concluded that the Persians of the Achaemenid era held the site sacred and associated it with Mithra, the deity of oaths and covenants as well as the sun god.

A large artificial terrace platform covering an area of 1.3 million square feet (125,000 square meters) was erected, and ceremonial halls, residential palaces, a treasury, and a chain of fortification were built on it. Ornate palace inscriptions by Darius welcomed visitors from distant provinces of the Persian Empire. In one of his inscriptions at the site, Darius acknowledged that the building of the structures on the site had been accomplished by artisans who hailed from the various nations that inhabited the Persian Empire. Indeed, the architecture of Persepolis borrowed heavily from the artistic and architectural designs of ancient Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Lydia, and many other nations. Workers from places as far away as Egypt, Lebanon, Lydia, India, and Central Asia contributed significantly to the construction and design of the magnificent palace complex. After the death of Darius I, his son Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE), followed by his grandson Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE), added their own buildings and inscriptions to the palace complex.

The main structures of Persepolis consisted of the grand double staircases; the palace of Darius I; the audience palace, known as Apadana; Xerxes I's Throne Hall, better known as the Hall of a Hundred Columns; the palace of Xerxes I; the second palace, or the harem of Xerxes I; the Tripylon, or the entranceway to the private palaces; and the treasury. The palace of Darius I was the oldest building in the complex, while the audience palace, or Apadana, was the largest and most impressive structure in Persepolis. The central hall of Apadana could host 10,000 guests. Its gigantic roof rested on large cedar beams imported from Lebanon and was further supported by long columns. The Hall of a Hundred Columns was the second-largest palace of Persepolis, and the palace of Xerxes I was twice the size of Darius's palace. Xerxes also added his own harem or private quarters for the members of the royal family. The construction of another important structure, namely the Tripylon, began during the rule of Xerxes I but was not completed until sometime during the reign of Artaxerxes I.

Between 1931 and 1934, a team of archaeologists from the University of Chicago under the supervision of Ernst Herzfeld made a significant discovery. Within the remains of the treasury, they unearthed some 30,000 clay tablets, each of which painstakingly

recorded payment of rations and salaries to a wide variety of individuals and groups, including state officials, workers, and members of various religious communities. The tablets offered a glimpse into the administrative acumen of the Achaemenids, whose fame had previously rested solely on their military exploits and conquests. Above the structures and palaces built atop the massive terrace platform, two royal tombs were carved into the hillside overlooking Persepolis. In place to this day, the tombs are those of Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE) and Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BCE).

The walls of the palaces and audience halls of Persepolis were adorned with sculptural figures representing the various provinces of the Persian Empire. The figures are shown walking in a long procession, and each bears a gift intended for the Great King. Depicted among these sculptural reliefs are representatives of the Medes, the Elamites, the Armenians, the Arians, the Babylonians, the Lydians, the Arachosians, the Assyrians, the Cappadocians, the Egyptians, the pointed-hat Scythians, the Ionians, the Bactrians, the Gandarians, the Parthians, the Asagartians, the Amyrgaean Scythians, the Indians, the Thracians, the Arabs, the Zarangians, the Libyans, and the Ethiopians. A Persian or Median officer holds the hand of the leader of each delegation and guides the visiting dignitaries into the presence of the Achaemenid monarch.

Persepolis, Takht-e Jamshid (Throne of Jamshid) in Persian, served as an important ceremonial and administrative center of the Persian Achaemenid Empire beginning in the reign of Darius I. The magnificent palace complex, which is located around 60 kilometers from the southern Iranian city of Shiraz, was one of the most celebrated sites of the ancient world. (Arazu/Dreamstime.com)

The reasons why Darius I built Persepolis and the functions behind its enormous structures have been extensively debated. Some scholars have maintained that Persepolis was built as a ceremonial palace for celebrating the Persian New Year (Nowruz). Others have rejected this theory, arguing that there is no evidence that the Achaemenid kings of ancient Iran celebrated Nowruz. And yet others have suggested that Persepolis was an architectural demonstration of Persian imperial power, one that also served as a major political and administrative center of the Achaemenid Empire.

Persepolis was burned and destroyed by Alexander the Macedon in 330 BCE. Before the arrival of Alexander's army in Persepolis, the Persian official responsible for the citadel rushed to the Macedonian camp and surrendered peaceably in hopes of saving the city and the palace complex. The Macedonian invaders did not, however, show any mercy. They looted the palaces and the vaults of the treasury, which contained enormous amounts of gold and silver. They then proceeded to massacre the inhabitants of the citadel as well as those who lived in the town below. Once they had completed their slaughter, Alexander torched the palace complex, which was the envy of the ancient world.

As one of the most historical and archaeological sites of the ancient world, Persepolis has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Cultural Heritage Site.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes I; Darius I; Xerxes I; Primary Documents: Document 14; Document 33

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Ray

Known in pre-Islamic times as Rhagae, Ray was an important urban

center during the Median (ca. 678–549 BCE), Achaemenid (550–330 BCE), Arsacid (247/238 BCE–224 CE), and Sasanian (224–651 CE) periods. Today, Ray is located a short distance south of Tehran, the capital of Iran, but with the rapid growth of Tehran in all directions, Ray has been incorporated as a neighborhood within the capital city. In ancient times, Ray was located on the main trade route connecting China, India, and Central Asia to western Iran and Mesopotamia.

In the 20th century, several mounds, including Cheshmeh Ali and Kuh-e Sorsoreh, attracted archaeologists to the ancient city of Ray. The first layer of Cheshmeh Ali dates back to a period between 5500 and 5200 BCE. Jars, vessels, and pots have been excavated from this site. Above this layer, archaeologists have identified an Iron Age layer dating back to 1000 BCE. The layers immediately above the Neolithic occupation belong to the Arsacid or Parthian period. During the long Arsacid rule, the site housed a citadel as well as a stone fortress. In excavations at the site, archaeologists have unearthed coins dating back to the reigns of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), Orodes I (r. 81/80–76/75 BCE), Phraates III (r. 71/70–58/57 BCE), Vonones (r. 8/9 CE), and Pacorus (r. 78/77–109/108 CE). In a nearby mound archaeologists discovered Sasanian-era settlements as well as a Sasanian fire temple.

A Muslim shrine called Bibi Shahrbanu on a hill in Ray is popularly believed to contain the body of Shahrbanu, a daughter of Yazdegerd III (r. 633–651 CE), the last king of the Persian Sasanian dynasty. A legend tells how the Persian princess was captured by the invading Arab armies and transported to Medina, in western Arabia, where she married Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and the second son of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the messenger of Islam, and Fatima, Muhammad's favorite daughter. According to the same legend, Hussein and Shahrbanu had a son, Ali Zayn al-Abedin, who succeeded his father after Hussein was martyred on the plains of Karbala in southern Iraq in 680. According to this legendary lineage, the Shia imams, starting with Zayn al-Abedin, carried royal Persian blood and were directly related through Shahrbanu to the Sasanian royal dynasty. Meanwhile, after the death of her husband Hussein, Shahrbanu returned to Iran, but the enemies of Hussein pursued her all the way to Ray. In a last desperate effort to save her life, the Persian princess sought God's protection. In response to her plea, the mountain suddenly opened, allowing her to conceal herself among the rocks. Sometime later a shrine was erected on the site, which emerged as a shrine for pilgrims through many centuries down to our time. There is no historical evidence to confirm the validity of the Shahrbanu legend and her marriage to the third Shia imam, Hussein. The scholar Mary Boyce has maintained that the site

was a pre-Islamic holy place dedicated to the veneration of the "Zoroastrian divinity" and the goddess of waters, "Anahitā," who carried the title of Banu (Lady), and "her shrine at Ray may well have been devoted to her as Šahrbānū [Shahrbānū] 'Lady of the Land [Iran]'" (Boyce: Bibi Šahrbānū).

Ray was the domain of the Mehran, one of the most powerful families of ancient Iran, particularly during the reign of the Sasanian monarchy. Sasanian army commander Bahram Chobin (Chubin), who seized the throne and was crowned as Bahram VI (r. 590–591 CE), hailed from the Mehran family. After the invasion of Iran by Arab Muslims and the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, Siyavash, a grandson of Bahram Chobin, revolted against the Arabs, but his rebellion was crushed. Ray prospered during the Islamic era, particularly during the reign of the Saljuq dynasty (r. 1037–1156). The city, however, was razed by the Mongols in the 13th century.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bibi Shahrbanu; *Religion:* Anahita

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Samarqand

A major urban center of Sogdiana, an Iranian-speaking region, that extended from the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in the south to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in the north, with its central region located in the Zarafshan and Kashka Darya River Valleys in present-day Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. The importance of Sogdiana is reflected in the mention of its name in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. Here, Sogdiana was described as the second of the good lands

and countries, which the great god Ahura Mazda created (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I: The Vendidad*). Until its destruction by Mongols in the 13th century CE, the city of Samarqand was also known as Afrasiyab.

Samarqand was one of the most important Iranian-populated cities of Sogdiana. The ancient Greeks called the city Maracanda. Archaeological excavations indicate that Samarqand was founded as a walled urban center before the establishment of the Persian Achaemenid Empire (r. 550–330 BCE) sometime between 650 and 550 BCE. After the fall of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty in 330 BCE, Alexander and his Macedonian army invaded Bactria and Sogdiana. The resistance against the Macedonians was first organized by Bessus, the Persian governor of Bactria who proclaimed himself the King of Asia after killing the last Achaemenid monarch, Darius III. After Bessus was captured and killed, a revolt erupted against the Macedonians under the leadership of Spitaman (Spitamanes), a Sogdian dignitary who laid siege to Samarqand. When Alexander sent one of his generals to relieve the city, Spitaman inflicted a crushing defeat on the Macedonian army. This defeat forced Alexander to rush to Samarqand, but he was informed that Spitaman had already departed for Bactria. Spitaman was eventually defeated and killed.

The Macedonians joined Sogdiana to Bactria to create a new province, but they never managed to impose their direct rule over the region. Each city in the region seems to have retained a high level of autonomy. Samarqand became part of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, which ruled from 250 to 125 BCE. This kingdom, which was based in present-day northern Afghanistan, ruled the territory extending from the Hindu Kush mountain range in the south to the Zarafshan River Valley in the north. The Greco-Bactrian kings also used Afghanistan to penetrate northern India. The Greco-Bactrian kingdom was destroyed by the Tochari or Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) nomadic groups, who eventually created the Kushan Empire. The Kushans ruled a vast empire that extended from the Tarim Basin in present-day western China to northern India. The Kushan state incorporated the region of Sogdiana and the city of Samarqand. In the second half of the fifth century CE, the Hephthalites invaded and occupied Sogdiana. Crossing the Oxus, they repeatedly threatened the eastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire, defeating Persian armies and killing the Sasanian monarch, Peroz. Determined to avenge the humiliating defeat his grandfather had suffered at the hands of the Hephthalites, the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan negotiated an alliance with the Western Turk Empire, which in the sixth century CE had emerged as the dominant political and military power in Central Asia. The Hephthalites were eventually defeated in a sustained military campaign organized jointly by the Western Turk Empire from the north and the Sasanian Empire

from the south. With the destruction of the Hephthalite Empire, Sogdiana, including the city of Samarqand, was incorporated into the Western Turk state. Like other cities of Sogdiana, however, Samarqand retained its own rulers, who carried the royal title "Ekhshid."

Invading Muslim Arab armies captured Samarqand in 712 CE. The Tang dynasty (r. 618–907 CE) in China attacked the region of Transoxiana in 748/749 CE. The Abbasids (r. 750–1258) based in Baghdad responded to the Tang invasion by sending a large army to Central Asia. The inevitable clash between the Muslim and Tang armies came in 751 on the Talas River on the present-day border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. After a long and fierce battle, the Chinese were forced to accept defeat and retreat to the Tarim Basin in the present-day Xinjiang province of northwestern China. The Muslim victory at Talas guaranteed the triumph of Islam over Buddhism in Central Asia. As Islam established itself as the dominant religion in Transoxiana and the western regions of present-day China, Buddhism retreated eastward. It was from captured Chinese prisoners of the 751 war that the people of Samarqand learned how to manufacture paper, an art that spread from Central Asia to the Near East and beyond.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, Samarqand served as one of the most important urban centers of the Persian Samanid state (r. 819–999), although it was the city of Bokhara that emerged as the capital of the emirate after Ismail I ascended the throne. The unknown author of the geography known as *Hodud ul-Alam min al-Mashriq el al-Maghrib,* which was written in the 10th century in the late Samanid period, described Samarqand as a large and prosperous center for merchants and traders from all over the world (Anonymous, *Hodud ul-Alam:* 107). Samarqand was also a major center for production of paper, which was exported to other countries (Anonymous, *Hodud ul-Alam:* 108). The open and tolerant environment of Samarqand was reflected in the fact that the Manicheans, the followers of the Iranian prophet Mani, who suffered persecution in the rest of the Islamic world, enjoyed the freedom to practice their religion in the city (Anonymous, *Hodud ul-Alam:* 107).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bokhara; Panjkand; *Ancient Provinces:* Sogdiana; Transoxiana

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Sar Mashhad

Sar Mashhad is a village in the southern Iranian province of Fars. The village is situated 40 miles (nearly 65 kilometers) south of the city of Kazerum and 136 miles (218 kilometers) from the city of Shiraz, the capital of Fars province. During the reign of the Achaemenid dynasty, a branch of the Royal Road, which connected the Persian capital of Susa to Persepolis, passed near the village. Sar Mashhad is home to a rock relief dating back to the reign of the fifth Sasanian king of kings, Bahram II, who ruled from 276 to 293 CE. The rock relief, which was carved on a mountain at a height of 65 feet from the ground, depicts the Sasanian monarch hunting two lions. As he kills the two wild beasts, Bahram holds the hand of his queen, while the Zoroastrian high priest Kartir and a prince of the royal family, most probably the king's son and crown prince, Bahram (the future Bahram III), watch the royal hunt. Below the rock relief of Bahram is an inscription by Kartir that describes the career and achievements of the powerful high priest who served four Sasanian monarchs: Shapur I, Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire; *Prophets:* Kartir

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Taq-e Bostan

In Persian, *taq* means "arch" and *bostan* means "garden." Taq-e Bostan therefore means "Garden's Arch." Taq-e Bostan is an important Sasanian historical site located near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. The site is home to two arched grottoes, two royal investiture scenes, and two highly detailed reliefs of a royal hunt dating back to the reign of the Persian Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). The reliefs provide the visitor with a rare glimpse into the daily life of Iran's Sasanian kings.

Taq-e Bostan is located at the foot of a mountain where a stream fed by a natural spring flows into a large artificial pool. During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty, several Persian monarchs chose the site for their statues and rock reliefs. The site probably had historical and religious significance even before the rise of the Sasanian monarchy to power. Several factors contribute to this likelihood. Taq-e Bostan is located only a short distance west of Bisotun, the site of the rock inscription of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty. Excavations at Taq-e Bostan by an Iranian archaeological team led by Seyfollah Kambakhsh Fard in 1970 also unearthed a Parthian cemetery at the top of a nearby rock cliff and a very short distance to the west discovered another Parthian site on a hillside known as Kuh-i Paroo.

Before ascending the Sasanian throne, the Persian king Bahram IV (r. 388–399 CE), who had served as the governor, or the shah of Kerman in southeastern Iran, founded a city in close proximity to Taq-e Bostan and named it Kermanshah after his former title. The city was located on the main trade route that linked China, India, and Central Asia to Iran and Mesopotamia.

Taq-e Bostan is an ancient historical and archaeological site near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. The most important properties in the complex are two porticos and several exceptional bas-reliefs dating back to the reigns of the Sasanian monarchs Ardashir II, Shapur III, and Khosrow II Parvez. (Vadim Kulikov/ Dreamstime.com)

The oldest relief at Taq-e Bostan depicts the investiture of the Sasanian monarch Ardashir II (r. 379–383 CE). Carved into a rectangular rock frame, the bas-relief shows the Persian king receiving the diadem of kingship and sovereignty from the hands of a crowned figure identified previously as the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and more recently as Ardashir's predecessor, Shapur II. Behind Ardashir II stands the sun god, Mithra, the guarantor of covenants and oaths. Mithra, who wears a crown festooned by rays of sun, holds a bundle of sacred twigs known as *barsom* and stands on a large lotus flower. Ardashir II and Ohrmazd/Shapur II stand on the body of a defeated foe, perhaps a Roman emperor.

Next to the bas-relief of the investiture of Ardashir II are two grottoes. On the back wall of the first and smaller grotto stand the sculptures of Shapur III (r. 383–388 CE), the immediate successor to Ardashir II, next to his father, Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE). The hands of both monarchs rest on the pommel of a large sword. This is clearly not an investiture scene because no diadem of kingship is exchanged between the two monarchs. In sharp contrast to the majority of other Sasanian reliefs, there is no disagreement on the identity of the two monarchs standing shoulder to shoulder because a Middle Persian inscription identifies them as Shapur II and Shapur III.

Next comes the larger arched grotto. The back wall of this grotto is divided into upper and lower panels. The upper panel depicts the

investiture of Khosrow II Parvez, who ruled from 590 to 628 CE. The Sasanian monarch stands in the middle flanked on the right by the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda), who is handing the Persian king the diadem of power. To the left of the king stands Anahid (Anahita), the goddess of waters and the patron deity of the Sasanian royal family. In the lower panel stands the statue of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II mounted on his horse, Shabdez (Shabdiz). Both the horse and his rider are dressed in full battle armor from head to foot. The face of the Persian monarch is completely covered and therefore invisible. On the interior left wall of the grotto appears a highly detailed carved relief of a royal boar hunt. The king is portrayed twice as he stands in a large boat targeting wild boars with his bow and arrow, while elephant riders drive the animals from the surrounding marshes toward the monarch. As the king discharges his arrows at the boars, female musicians in smaller boats play music. On the interior right wall is another detailed relief depicting the king three times: first, arriving on his horse in the hunting ground; second, as he rides and hunts deer in a forest; and third, as he departs the scene after the end of the hunt. As in the boar hunt, here too musicians are depicted playing their instruments. Outside the grotto and in the middle of the arch, the Sasanian royal crescent is shown flanked by two winged angels who hold the diadem of power. The two pilasters on either side of the arch are marked by a tree of life.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir II; Khosrow II Parvez; Shapur II; Shapur III; *Religion:* Mithra

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Ancient Provinces and Geographical Regions

OVERVIEW ESSAY

The entries in this chapter offer historical overviews of some of the important geographical regions and provinces contained within the borders of Greater Iran's pre-Islamic empires. These regions and provinces are drawn from those mentioned in the *Avesta,* the ancient Zoroastrian holy book; those included in the inscriptions of the Persian kings of the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties; and others described in the writings of Greek and Roman historians and geographers. Those provinces and regions drawn from the pages of the *Avesta* are among the most ancient names in Iranian history. They are introduced within a collection of Avestan texts called the Vendidad (Vīdēvdāt), which has been invariably translated as "The Law against Demons," "The Antidemonic Law," "The Law Repudiating the Demons," or "The Law against Evil Beings." Most of the Vendidad focuses on the issue of pollution and provides a set of rules by which individuals can practice purification. The first section of the Vendidad, however, focuses on the creations of the great god Ahura Mazda and lists the lands he created to provide a homeland for the Iranian people in great antiquity. Among these lands were provinces such as Sogdiana, located today within the borders of the Central Asian republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; Bactria, corresponding with present-day northern Afghanistan; and Margiana, in modern-day southern Turkmenistan.

The inscriptions of the Achaemenid and Sasanian kings as well as Middle Persian texts also contain important information about the provinces of the Achaemenid and Sasanian Empires. For example, the long royal inscription of Darius I at Bisotun, near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran, lists the 23 countries and provinces that were ruled by the Persian Achaemenid dynasty. He also informs his readers that several of these provinces had revolted against him after he had killed the usurper, Gaumata, seizing power with the support

and assistance of six fellow Persian officers. Here too are names significant to the history of the ancient world, such as Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Armenia, Media, Parthia, Sogdiana, Bactria, Arachosia, and Persia itself. Another important inscription, that of Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam, provides us with the geographical and political extent of the Sasanian Empire during the reign of its second monarch. Among the important texts written in Middle Persian, the language of the pre-Islamic Sasanian dynasty, is *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr* [The Provincial Capitals of Iran], which lists and describes the important cities of Greater Iran during the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). The book relies on a mixture of historical, religious, and legendary sources, such as traditional stories and myths from ancient Iran and various accounts from the *Avesta.* The date for its initial composition is unknown, but the *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr* was clearly revised several times during Sasanian times and into the Islamic era.

Because of the paucity of Iranian primary sources, we are forced to rely heavily on the writings of Greeks and Romans who were generally hostile toward Iranians and Iranian dynasties, which for centuries successfully resisted eastward Roman expansion and on several occasions inflicted humiliating defeats on Roman armies. Among the major shortcomings of these sources is the limited knowledge of the Greek and Roman historians and geographers about the Iranian hinterland as well as the important eastern provinces of Iran, which enjoyed close political, cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties with such important centers of world civilization as Central Asia, China, and India. Despite such inadequacies, however, some of the information that these classical sources provide is invaluable to our understanding of ancient Iran.

Abar Shahr

The name of a province in the western part of present-day Khorasan during the Sasanian period (r. 224–651 CE). The administrative capital of Abar Shahr was Nēv Shapur (modern-day Neyshabur), a city built by Shapur I, the second monarch of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who ruled from 239/240/241/242 to 270/272 CE. Shapur I may have built the town in the first year of his reign after he pacified Chorasmia (Khwarazm) on the lower reaches of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) south of the Aral Sea and Hyrcania (modern-day Gorgan) in northern Iran on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea (Markwart: 52). In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in the southern Iranian province of Fars, Shapur I included “Aparshahr” as one of the provinces of the

Sasanian Empire (Frye: 371). Abarshahr is mentioned again in the accounts of the reigns of the two Sasanian monarchs, Kavad I and Khosrow I. When Kavad I (r. 488–496 CE and again 499–531 CE) was deposed from the throne in 496 BCE, he fled to the Hephthalites, among whom he had grown up. He intended to raise an army with the support of the Hephthalites and recapture the Persian throne. One source claims that on his journey eastward Kavad made a stop at Abarshahr, where he stayed at the house of a local member of the nobility. The nobleman had a daughter whom Kavad married. His son, Khosrow (Khosrow I Anushiravan), was born from this union between the Persian king and a young woman from Abar Shahr (Tabari: 6.641). The 14th-century geographer and historian Hamdollah Mostowfi identified Abar Shahr (i.e., Abar Shahreh or Hamshahreh) as a district located in close proximity to the Caspian Sea and the seat of power of Farhad, the son of Godarz, presumably an Arsacid monarch (Mustawfi: 91).

Together with Marv, Herat, and Balkh, Neyshabur served as one of the most important political, administrative, and commercial centers of northeastern Iran (i.e., Khorasan) during the Sasanian period (r. 224–651 CE). Neyshabur remained an important urban center after the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651. The city was identified as the largest city of Khorasan by the Muslim geographer Istakhri (Istakhri: 205), and it thrived during the reigns of the Iranian and Turkic dynasties, which ruled Khorasan in the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries, including the Taherids, the Samanids, the Ghaznavids, and the Saljuqs. In the 13th century, the Mongols destroyed the city and massacred its population.

Because the Persian word *abr* means "cloud," several geographers of the Islamic era assumed that *abar* was the same word as *abr* and therefore that Abarshahr meant "City of Cloud" or "Cloud City" (Gaube: Abaršahr). Western scholars generally interpreted the name to mean "Upper Country," with *abar* translated as "upper" and *shahr* as "country" or "city." The scholar James Markwart, however, rejected these interpretations and maintained that the name Abarshahr referred to "the country of the Aparak" (Latin: Aparni or Parni), an Iranian Scythian group from which the Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) had hailed (Markwart: 52). Arsaces (Arshak), a Parni or Aparni leader of the Dahae, founded the Arsacid (Parthian) state in 238 BCE after he invaded and conquered Parthia in the present-day Khorasan region of northeastern Iran. The Greek geographer Strabo stated that Arsaces, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, was "a Scythian" who "with some of the Däae (I mean the Aparnians, as they were called, nomads who lived along the Ochus), invaded Parthia and conquered it" (Strabo: 11.9.2–3). Modern-day Neyshabur remains a

thriving urban center in the Khorasan region of Iran.

See also: *Cultures:* Aparni; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur I; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Abarkavan

During the late Sasanian period (r. 224–651 CE), Abarkavan (Abarkāvān) was the name of the present-day Iranian island of Qeshm in the Persian Gulf. The island is situated in the Straits of Hormoz in the eastern part of the Persian Gulf a few miles off the southern coast of Iran and separated from the Iranian mainland by the Strait of Khuran. The 10th-century Muslim Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal refers to the island as "Barkāvān" (Ibn Hawqal: 37). He stated that as with several other islands in the Persian Gulf, "Barkāvān" was a precinct under the jurisdiction of Ardashir Khowreh, one of the five administrative districts of the province of Fars in southern Iran during the Sasanian period (Ibn Hawqal: 37). As late as the 14th century CE, the geographer Hamdallah Mustawfi referred to the island as "Abarkāfān" (Mustawfī: 234). Mustawfi listed Abarkāfān with Bahrain and Khark as one of the Iranian islands of the Persian Gulf (Mustawfī:

234). If "Kāvān" means "of the lineage of Kaveh/Kava" in Middle Persian (Kasheff: Abarkāvān), then the island may have been named after one of the great legendary heroes of ancient Iran, Kaveh, the blacksmith who revolted against the tyrant Zahhak. Today, Abarkavan/Qeshm is Iran's largest island.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan; Khosrow II Parvez; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Adiabene

A kingdom in northern Mesopotamia that served as a vassal state of the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire (247/238 BCE–224 CE). Though the exact boundaries of Adiabene are unknown, it is generally believed that its territory corresponded with the northwestern part of historical Assyria, in the present-day Kurdish-populated region of northern Iraq. In his *Natural History,* Pliny described Adiabene as "where the land of the Assyrians begins" (Pliny: 6.41). The Tigris River formed the western boundary of Adiabene, while the Zagros mountain range separated its eastern districts from Media and the rest of western Iran. The Upper or Greater Zab River formed the northern boundary, and the Lower or Lesser Zab constituted the southern border of the province. The capital of Adiabene was Arbela, where "the later Parthian monarchs were allegedly buried" (Colledge: 58). Aside from its historical significance and strategic location, the importance of Adiabene lay primarily with its location on the main trade routes, which not only connected Iran to Mesopotamia and Syria but also linked the commercial centers of the Persian Gulf and southern Mesopotamia to the urban centers of Asia Minor and beyond.

Adiabene was originally part of the ancient Assyrian kingdom, which was destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians in 612 BCE. After three centuries of dominating the political life of the ancient

Near East, the Assyrian kingdom ceased to exist, and its territory was divided between Babylonians and the Medes. A significant part of Assyria, including the future kingdom of Adiabene, was absorbed by the emerging Median Empire. When the last Median king, Astyages, was defeated by Cyrus II, the king of Anshan, the newly emerging Persian state seized all the former provinces of the Median Empire, including the entire territory of Assyria. In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran near the city of Kermanshah, the Persian monarch Darius I listed Athura or Assyria as one of the provinces of his empire (Kent: 117, 119). In 331 BCE, Assyria was the site of the battle in which Alexander and his Macedonian army defeated Darius III, the last Achaemenid king. This defeat signaled the end of the Achaemenid Empire. According to Pliny, the Macedonians referred to the whole of Adiabene as Mygdonia or Macedonia, "from its likeness to Mygdonia in Macedon [Macedonia]" (Pliny: 6.41). The Seleucid Empire, which was founded by Seleucus, one of Alexander's Macedonian generals, reorganized the provinces of the Persian Achaemenid Empire into smaller entities. One of these new provinces was Adiabene.

The Arsacids (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) defeated the Seleucid state and forced it out of Iran and Mesopotamia. Under their charismatic ruler Mithridates I, who ruled from 171 to 139/138 BCE, the Parthian armies captured Assyria, but they could not retain their newly conquered territory. It was not until 94 BCE, during the reign of Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), that the Parthians annexed the kingdoms of Adiabene, Gordyene, and Osroene, establishing the Euphrates River as their western boundary and thus becoming the eastern neighbor of Rome.

Despite its conquest of Mesopotamia, the Arsacid dynasty did not impose a centralized system of government over the region. Indeed, for much of its history, the Arsacid state ruled a highly decentralized empire, allowing local rulers to assume the title of king, although they were not allowed to mint their own coins. Thus, the western frontiers of the Parthian Empire remained dotted by small kingdoms such as Adiabene, which enjoyed a great deal of autonomy (Colledge: 58). The kingdom of Adiabene was ruled by kings called Izates (Ezad), while the neighboring kingdom of Osroene based in Edessa (present-day Urfa in southeastern Turkey) was ruled by a line of Nabatean kings named Abgar. Another Arab family ruled the northern Mesopotamian kingdom of Hatra. Situated as they were on the border between the Parthian Empire and the Roman Empire, these kingdoms served as buffer states and survived by vacillating between the two superpowers.

Through the writings of Josephus and Tacitus we learn that sometime during the early first century CE, the ruler of Adiabene,

Monobazus, sent his youngest son and designated successor, Izates II (Ezad), to Abennerig, king of Characene or Mesene, to protect him from his older brothers, who resented and hated their younger brother. The capital of Characene, Charax-Spasini, situated on the coast of the Persian Gulf in present-day Kuwait, was a major commercial center during the Parthian and Sasanian periods. King Abennerig welcomed the young prince from Adiabene and arranged a marriage between Izates and his daughter Samacha. During his stay in Charax-Spasini, Izates converted to Judaism through the teachings and guidance of Ananias, a Jewish merchant. At the same time that Izates converted to Judaism, it so happened that his mother, Helena, also joined the Jewish faith. The queen demonstrated her devotion to her new religion by making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 46 CE. Having witnessed the hunger and suffering of the Jewish population, the queen ordered shiploads of grain from Alexandria and figs from Cyprus to be transported to Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the aging King Monobazus, who sensed his approaching death, summoned his son, Izates, to Adiabene. Izates returned home accompanied by the merchant Ananias, who emerged as his personal adviser and confidant on religious matters.

When King Monobazus died, the queen, Helena, convened a council of Adiabene's governors, army commanders, and high officials and inquired whether they agreed with the decision of the deceased king, Monobazus, to choose his youngest son, Izates, as the next ruler of their kingdom. The members of the council expressed their support for the selection of Izates as their next king, and they recommended that all of the new king's brothers be slaughtered so that the transfer of power could be carried out without any disruption. The queen mother responded by recommending that the decision on the fate of the brothers of Izates be deferred until the arrival of the new king. Although the queen mother saved the princes of the royal family from execution, the grandees insisted that the brothers of the new king at least be detained and held in bonds until Izates had ascended the throne. As they awaited the arrival of the new king, the queen mother, Helena, placed the oldest son of Monobazus, also named Monobazus, on the throne to ensure a peaceful transition of power. When Izates arrived in the capital in 36 CE, his older brother, Monobazus, abdicated and allowed Izates to ascend the throne. Shortly after seizing the reins of power, the new king released his brothers from bondage and sent them as hostages to Rome and Parthia. Izates II intended to publicize his conversion to Judaism and undergo circumcision. His mother, however, opposed such actions on the grounds that any public demonstration of Jewish customs on the part of the king would alienate Izates's subjects from their ruler. Despite

her opposition, Izates went through circumcision.

Sometime during the reign of Izates, the Arsacid king Artabanus II (r. 10/11–38 CE) arrived in Adiabene seeking refuge from his enemies, who had forced him out of power. Izates II welcomed Artabanus and received him with kindness, respect, and magnanimity. He also interceded on behalf of Artabanus and requested that the Arsacid king be restored to his throne. Izates's intercession proved effective: the reigning Arsacid monarch wrote to Artabanus and invited him to return and regain his crown. When Artabanus returned, the reigning Arsacid king removed the crown from his own head and placed it on the brow of the former monarch. In return for his extraordinary generosity and support, Artabanus showered Izates with gifts and honors, allowing the king of Adiabene to "wear his tiara upright, and to sleep upon a golden throne[,] … privileges and marks of honor peculiar to the kings of Parthia" (Josephus: 20.3.4). Artabanus also took Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey from the king of Armenia and placed it under the control of Izates. When Artabanus II died, the new Parthian king Vardanes, who ruled from 38 to 45 CE, approached Izates and asked for his support in a new military expedition against the Romans. Izates rejected the idea and tried to persuade the Arsacid king to adopt a more conciliatory attitude toward such a dangerous and formidable power as Rome. Before Vardanes could embark on his campaign, however, he was overthrown and replaced by his brother Gotarzes II who ruled from 43/44 to 51 CE.

The Romans, who never lost an opportunity to intervene in the internal affairs of the Parthian Empire and undermine its political stability, sent an Arsacid pretender, Meherdates, to northern Mesopotamia in 49 CE. After spending some time at the court of the king of Edessa, the Parthian rebel marched to Adiabene and stayed with Izates, who had "embraced the alliance with Meherdates, though secretly and in better faith he inclined to Gotarzes," the reigning Arsacid king (Tacitus: 221). As Meherdates and his army approached the Parthian line of defense, both Izates of Adiabene and the ruler of Edessa deserted with their troops. Emboldened by Meherdates's diminished and weakened force, Gotarzes attacked. Meherdates was captured and delivered in chains to Gotarzes, who cut off his ears, thus disfiguring him and thereby debarring him from seizing the Arsacid throne (Tacitus: 222).

Impressed by Izates's success and good fortune, the king's brother Monobazus, as well as other members of Adiabene's royal family, decided to abandon their religion and embrace Judaism. The popularity of Judaism among the members of the ruling family angered and alienated a group of Adiabene's grandees who opposed

the abandonment of traditional religious beliefs, customs, and traditions. In a plot to overthrow Izates, they approached an Arab chieftain, Abia, and implored him to invade Adiabene and remove their king. When Abia attacked Adiabene, however, Izates defeated his army. Recognizing the need to involve a more powerful ruler in their scheme, the plotters now approached the Arsacid monarch Vologeses I (Valakhsh I) (r. 51–76/80 CE) and beseeched him to remove their king and replace Izates with a member of the Arsacid dynasty. When Vologeses attacked Adiabene, Izates, who was painfully aware of the superiority of Parthian forces, resorted to prayer, pleading with God to rescue him from defeat and humiliation. God answered his prayers: before he could attack Izates, Vologeses was forced to withdraw his army and return east to quell the invasion of the Parthian territory by Saka tribes.

Izates died in 60 CE. The death of the queen mother, Helena, followed shortly thereafter. The new king of Adiabene, Monobazus, the older brother of Izates and a convert to Judaism as well, sent the bodies of his mother and brother to Jerusalem for burial. In 61 CE, shortly after Monobazus had ascended the throne, the ruler of Armenia, Tigranes, attacked Adiabene. The kingdom of Adiabene survived this invasion with assistance and support from the Parthian state. Monobazus and his family continued to fight against Roman forces, which invaded Mesopotamia.

In 114, the Roman emperor Trajan invaded Armenia and Mesopotamia. During the first stage of his campaign, the Roman forces marched from Armenia to northern Mesopotamia, invading and capturing Nisibis (modern-day Nusaybin in southeastern Turkey). The following year Trajan split his forces, with one army moving south along the banks of the Euphrates River and the second, under the personal command of Trajan, crossing the Tigris River and marching against the Arsacid capital, Ctesiphon, near modern-day Baghdad. The Roman force targeting the Parthian capital defeated the ruler of Adiabene, Mebarsapes, and annexed his province, which was renamed Assyria. The Parthians adopted a scorched-earth policy, destroying sources of food and water. Trajan, however, continued with his march and eventually seized Ctesiphon in 116. The Parthians responded to the Roman invasion by attacking and raiding Assyria, inflicting heavy casualties on Roman forces. The Parthian campaign in Adiabene forced Trajan to return to northern Mesopotamia. The Romans managed to push the Parthian forces out of Adiabene temporarily, but they failed to capture the well-defended city of Hatra. When the Roman emperor finally returned home, he left a king, Parthamaspates, who was assigned the task of ruling Mesopotamia and Adiabene as a loyal client of Rome. This arrangement, however, proved to be short-

lived. Parthamaspates was defeated by the Parthian king Osroes, but the Parthians failed to recover Adiabene. The Roman emperor Hadrian, who succeeded Trajan in 117 CE, withdrew his forces from the territories they had occupied during Trajan's invasion, although Adiabene remained under Roman control. Throughout the campaigns of Trajan in the east, the Jewish population of Mesopotamia allied itself with the Parthians of Iran, who had historically displayed a high level of tolerance for religious diversity, allowing Jews and other religious communities to practice their religions in freedom. Many Jews paid a heavy price for their alliance with the Parthians, with some of their leaders slaughtered by the Romans. But Judaism was not the only religion spreading and finding new converts in Adiabene. Christianity was also making inroads in Adiabene, converting many Jews to the teachings of Christ. During the reign of the Arsacid monarch Vologeses V, who ruled from 191/192 to 207/208 CE, the Parthians took advantage of the internal conflict between contenders to the Roman throne to attack northern Mesopotamia. Adiabene was captured by Vologeses, who killed its pro-Roman ruler, Narseh. When Septimius Severus emerged as the new Roman emperor, he organized a campaign against the Parthians in 196. Though initially successful, Severus was forced to return west to quell a rebellion in Gaul. Once again, the Parthians used this opportunity to regain most of the territories they had lost in Mesopotamia.

The Roman campaigns in Mesopotamia continued until the fall of the Arsacid dynasty in 224 CE. During the reign of Caracalla (r. 211–217 CE), the Romans once again invaded Mesopotamia, but they failed to defeat the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV (r. 213–224 CE). By the end of Arsacid rule, Adiabene had emerged as a major center of Christianity. Indeed, it was the scholars of Edessa and Adiabene who translated the Old and New Testaments into Syriac. When Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, revolted against the Arsacid monarch Artabanus IV, the ruler of Adiabene joined him. In 224 CE, Ardashir defeated and killed Artabanus on the battlefield. The death of Artabanus IV signaled the end of the Arsacid dynasty and the emergence of the Persian Sasanian state, which would rule from 224 to 651 CE. Ardashir I quickly imposed his authority on the provinces of the Parthian Empire. Those local kings and governors who submitted voluntarily to his rule were allowed to retain their power, and those who refused were removed and replaced by a Sasanian prince, often one of the sons of the Sasanian king. In 235 CE, Ardashir attacked and conquered Mosul, in present-day Iraq, and Carrhae, in present-day southeastern Turkey on the border with northern Syria. He could not, however, capture Adiabene. Ardashir also failed to take the important city of Hatra in northern

Mesopotamia, which played a vital role in linking the economies of the ancient Near East to Rome. During the reign of Ardashir's son and successor Shapur I, who ruled from 239/240/241/242 to 270/272 CE, the Sasanians continued to fight the Romans over control of Armenia and Mesopotamia. Shapur I celebrated his victories over the Roman armies and listed the provinces of his vast empire in an inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near the present-day city of Shiraz in the province of Fars in southern Iran. Adiabene was mentioned in this inscription as one of the provinces of the Sasanian Empire.

In the fourth century CE, as Christianity emerged as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the number of Christians increased significantly in Adiabene. The establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire by Emperor Theodosius in 380 left an adverse impact on the relationship between the Christians of Adiabene and the Sasanian state. The Sasanians suspected the Christians of Mesopotamia of being potential allies of their greatest enemy, the Romans. In the seventh century, Arbela emerged as the metropolitan see of Nestorian Christianity (Sellwood: Adiabene). By then the Sasanians no longer regarded these Christians as potential traitors, and the relationship between the two sides had improved markedly. After the collapse of the Sasanian Empire in 651 and the conquest of present-day northern Iraq by Muslim Arabs, Adiabene began a new chapter in its long and rich history under the name of Hadyab (Sellwood: Adiabene).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus II; Vologeses I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; Shapur I; *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Alborz

The Alborz (Persian: Reshteh Kuha-ye Alborz) is a mountain range in northern Iran. The 560-mile (901-kilometer) mountain range separates the northern provinces of Iran, namely Gilan, Mazandaran, and Golestan lying on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea from the rest of the country. The highest point in the Alborz is the majestic Mount Damavand, at 18,406 feet (5,610 meters). A silent volcano situated 44 miles (66 kilometers) northeast of Tehran, Damavand is also the highest peak in the Middle East. Damavand plays a prominent role in Iranian mythology and ancient Iran's legendary history.

The Alborz consists of two distinct climatic zones. The northern region, which has an average annual rainfall of 39.4 inches in the lowlands, is covered with dense vegetation and lush forests, while the southern zone is dry and has an average annual rainfall of 11 to 20 inches, although in some areas it has juniper forests. Numerous rivers originate from the Alborz. Those in the northern zone empty into the Caspian, and those on the southern zone provide water for drinking and irrigation for the communities lying on the southern slopes of the range, including the city of Tehran, capital of Iran. The major dams built on several of these rivers, including the Karaj Dam, the Sefid Rud Dam, and the Jajerud Dam, also generate hydroelectric energy for Iran's capital city and other urban and rural communities. The Caspian forests of northern Iran were known for centuries for their Hyrcanian or Caspian tigers, the last of which were hunted into extinction in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Other magnificent wild cats, such as leopards, however, continue to roam the lush forests of northern Iran. Additionally, the Alborz is home to bears, red deer, ibex, mountain sheep, and a variety of majestic birds, such as eagles and pheasants.

The Alborz mountain range of northern Iran separates the Caspian provinces of the country from the central Iranian uplands to the south. (Aref Friis/Dreamstime.com)

The Alborz played an important role in the mythology of ancient Iran. In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, Haraiti Barez (Alborz) is identified as the first mountain "that rose up out of the earth," a mountain that "stretches all along the shores of the land washed by waters (the Caspian Sea) towards the east" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Yasht, 19.1). Alborz appears as a sacred mountain, which possesses holy powers: the sun and the moon as well as the stars revolve around the Alborz. Mithra, the deity of covenants and oaths and later the sun god of ancient Iran, resides on the highest point of the Alborz, where it can watch the entire world (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Yasht, 10.13). Alborz is also the site for several momentous events in the legendary history of ancient Iran. There was evidently a tendency from ancient times to attach legends to the great mountain, which in one Pahlavi text is said to rise up from Airyanem Vaejah, or Eranvej, the mythical homeland of the Iranian people.

In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] of Ferdowsi, the life of the great legendary king Fereydun (Thraetaona of the *Avesta*) is closely tied to the Alborz Mountains. Fereydun's father, Abtin (Aptin), is murdered by the tyrant Zahhak. Fereydun's mother, Faranak, who is trying to save her son from the fate visited upon his father, carries her infant son to a distant pastureland, where she begs a rancher to allow her son to receive nourishment by drinking the milk of a beautiful cow named Barmaye. Shocked and saddened by the state of Faranak and her son, the rancher offers refuge to Fereydun. When the boy reaches

the age of three, the evil king Zahhak and his henchmen discover Faranak's hideout and attack, but before their arrival Faranak, accompanied by Fereydun, escapes to find refuge for her son in the Alborz Mountains, which is identified by the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi as a mountain range rising in India. Zahhak, who is haunted by fear of being dethroned and imprisoned, continues to search for Faranak and her child. Enraged by his failure to capture them, the cruel Zahhak exacts his revenge by killing the kind and beautiful cow Barmaye.

Fereydun lives in the Alborz Mountains until he is 16 years old, when he comes down from his hideout to visit his mother. The reunion between the mother and son allows Fereydun to ask his mother about his father and the reasons he must live in hiding. In response, Faranak reveals the tragic story of the family. After hearing about the cruel fate of his father, Fereydun vows to exact revenge and punish the brutal Zahhak for his heinous crimes. Soon Fereydun emerges as the leader of a popular uprising led by the blacksmith Kaveh. Kaveh revolts against the tyrant Zahhak after the king's henchmen detain his sons. The demonic monarch murders young men so he can feed their brains to the two serpents that have grown on his shoulders. His persistent demand to sacrifice innocent human beings to feed his hungry serpents outrages his subjects, who nonetheless out of fear of retribution do not protest his monstrous acts. Kaveh, however, refuses to allow his sons to be sacrificed silently and submissively. The blacksmith walks into the palace of the cannibalistic tyrant to protest. After listening to Kaveh's pleas, Zahhak orders the blacksmith's sons to be released but demands that in return for this display of royal mercy and compassion Kaveh sign a proclamation that declares the king to be a just and upright ruler. This demand enrages Kaveh, who tears up the document and storms out of the palace. As he leaves the palace, Kaveh places his blacksmith's leather apron on a long pole to use it as the flag and standard of his rebellion. Crowds gather around Kaveh, and his protest quickly turns into a mass uprising. The rebellious blacksmith and his supporters march to the Alborz Mountains seeking Fereydun, a descendant of the great kings Tahmures and Jamshid, who is hailed as the legitimate king. Having left his hiding place, Fereydun raises an army and marches against Zahhak, defeating the tyrant. Zahhak is then dragged in chains to a cave in Mount Damavand, the highest peak in the Alborz mountain range.

Another Iranian legend centered on the Alborz Mountains is the story of Zal (pronounced as Zāl). Zal or Dastan is the son of Sam (pronounced as Sām) and the grandson of Nariman, both legendary heroes in Iranian mythology. Because Dastan is born with snowy

white hair he is called Zal, which is the word for "albino" in Persian. His father, Sam, who blames the evil spirit, or Ahriman, for the curious and unusual appearance of his son, curses his fate and decides to abandon the infant Zal at the foot of the Alborz Mountains, which is once again identified by the epic poet Ferdowsi as a range in India. The child cries out in his loneliness and desperation until he is observed by the magical, wise, and powerful bird Simorgh, who has a nest in the Alborz. Simorgh carries the infant to her nest and raises him as her own son. The young boy grows up to become a strong and handsome man. Meanwhile, the aging and ailing Sam begins to regret his decision to abandon Zal and embarks on a journey to recover him. In his search for his lost son, Sam travels to the Alborz Mountains. After pleading with god to return his son safely to him, Sam finally discovers Zal. At first the young man refuses to abandon his adopted mother, Simorgh, and return to his father, but after the bird promises him a brilliant and dazzling future and hands him samples of her feathers, Zal descends from the Alborz and joins his father. Simorgh assures Zal that in times of need, despair, and peril he should throw one of the feathers, which contains god's glory, into a fire, and the bird would appear at once to guide and assist him. These individual feathers from Simorgh would play an important role in the life of Zal and his family, particularly in the heroic feats of his son, Rostam.

Another momentous event in the legendary history of Iran that takes place at the Alborz Mountains is the heroic sacrifice of the archer Arash, one of the legendary heroes of ancient Iran. An early mention of Arash appears in the Zoroastrian scripture the *Avesta,* which describes him as the archer Erekhsha, or he of the swiftest arrow among the Aryans (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Yasht, 8.6, 37). In Pahlavi, Erekhsha appears as "Arish Shivātir" or "Arish of the swift arrow," the best and most accomplished archer in the Iranian army during the reign of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty. When Manuchehr (Minōchihr), the king of Iran, decides to make peace with his greatest enemy, Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, it is stipulated that the best of Iran's archers should discharge an arrow towards the east, and wherever the arrow falls shall designate the boundary between Iran and Turan. Arash volunteers to climb the mountain and discharge his arrow toward the east. The arrow of the great archer travels from dawn until noon and falls on the banks of the Oxus River, or Amu Darya. The Middle Persian text *Mah-e Farvardin Ruz-e Khordad* [The Month of Farvardin the Day of Khordad] states that on the sixth day of Farvardin, the first month of the Iranian calendar, King Manuchehr, together with Arash of the swift arrow, reclaimed the Iranian lands from Afrasiyab the Turanian who had invaded Iran (Kia: 8). The story of Arash the archer is repeated in the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]

composed by the Persian poet Ferdowsi. According to Ferdowsi, Manuchehr, the king of Iran, is engaged in a fierce battle against the armies of Iran's sworn enemies, the Turanians, in the region of Tabarestan, which corresponds with the present-day northern Iranian province of Mazandaran, located on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and the northern slopes of the Alborz mountain range. The Turanians, led by their king Afrasiyab, have surrounded the Iranian army. At this point, both sides agree to end the war and conclude a peace treaty. According to the peace agreement, the boundary between Iran and Turan will be established by an archer who will shoot his arrow in an easterly direction from the top of a mountain. Wherever the arrow lands will be recognized as the boundary between the two kingdoms. Thus, the brilliant archer Arash is ordered by the Iranian king to discharge his arrow as far east as he can. As the sun rises on the horizon, Arash climbs Mount Damavand and, upon reaching its highest point, discharges his arrow, which travels long and far before it lands at the end of the day on the banks of the Oxus River. As he had predicted before climbing the mountain, Arash dies upon releasing his arrow. There are several versions of the legend of Arash, many claiming different locations for the mountain from which the arrow is discharged and for the place where it lands. Most sources agree that the arrow is discharged from somewhere in the Alborz mountain range, and despite their differences on where the arrow lands, these sources mostly concur that it is somewhere in northern Afghanistan or Central Asia, the most popular site being a walnut tree on the banks of the Oxus River, the present-day border of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with Afghanistan.

The Alborz Mountains also play an important role in the story of the emergence of the legendary Kayanian dynasty. The death of Garshashp, king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty, leaves the throne of Iran vacant. The Turanians and their king Afrasiyab, who are presented as the formidable enemies of Iran, use the weakness of the Iranian state to attack. The Iranian nobility appeals to the great hero Zal to lead the resistance against the foreign invaders. Zal appoints his son, Rostam, as the commander of Iran's army. But both Zal and Rostam are painfully aware that aside from a strong army and a capable general, the country also needs a new king who possesses the divine glory (*farr* or *farr-e izadi*) and the sufficient qualifications to rule. They therefore select a descendant of the great king Fereydun, who like his ancestor lives in hiding in the Alborz Mountains. This young and capable man is Kay Qobad (the *Avesta*'s Kavi Kavata), who agrees to ascend the throne of Iran as the founder of the Kayanian dynasty. The son and successor of Kay Qobad, Kay Kavus orders the demons (*devs/deevs*) to build two large and magnificent palaces for

him on the Alborz Mountains.

See also: *Ancient Provinces:* Hyrcania; *Legendary Kings:* Arash; Fereydun; Kaveh; Zahhak

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Anshan

In antiquity, Anshan referred to an Elamite-populated region in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars. The exact date for the arrival in Anshan of Iranian-speaking people, particularly the Persians, is unknown. Some scholars assert that they reached Anshan as early as 1600 BCE, while others claim that the Persians began to penetrate the region of Fars circa 1000 BCE. Anshan was the birthplace of Cyrus II the Great (Kurush II), the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. The father of Cyrus II, Cambyses I (Kambujiya I), and his grandfather, Cyrus I (Kurush I), were kings of Anshan and vassals of the Median kings who ruled their empire from Hagmatana (Ecbatana), present-day Hamedan in western Iran. Cyrus the Great also referred to himself as the king of Anshan. It is not exactly clear when the name of the region changed from Anshan to Parsa. Some scholars have maintained that the name of the region changed from Anshan to Parsa (Persia) during the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE).

Ancient Sumerian and Akkadian writings from the third millennium BCE contain the earliest references to Anshan or Anzan. These sources indicate that Anshan served as a major political center for the Elamite kings during the second half of the third millennium BCE. Until recently, scholars generally subscribed to the widely held belief that Anshan was located somewhere in the central regions of the Zagros mountain range in western Iran. It was also believed that Parsua or Parsumash, which is mentioned for the first time on a stone slab dating from the reign of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari (r. 810–

783 BCE), referred to Parsa, the province from which the Persian king Cyrus II rose to power and prominence. In addition, it was believed that King Kurash or Kurush of Parsumash or Parsuwash, who sent his oldest son Arukku to Nineveh with tribute for the Assyrian monarch Assurbanipal (r. 668–627 BCE), was Cyrus I, the king of Parsa and the grandfather of Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire. Based on these conjectures, experts concluded that the Neo-Assyrian Parsua of the mid-seventh century was a reference to Parsa, the land of the ancient Persians. This theory, however, has been rejected more recently by a group of scholars who have maintained that the Parsua mentioned in Assyrian sources refers instead to a place in western Iran, specifically the central Zagros region of Iran, and does not have any direct connection with Parsa, the birthplace of Cyrus and his dynasty in southern Iran.

In 1879, the Assyrian-born archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam unearthed one of ancient history's most significant artifacts, a find that would shed considerable light on the history of Anshan and on the history of ancient Persia. In Babylon, at a site associated with the chief Babylonian god Marduk, located in present-day southern Iraq, Rassam discovered the Cyrus Cylinder. On this cylindrical tablet, Cyrus II introduced himself as the son of Cambyses I, the grandson of Cyrus I, and a descendant of Teispes, all of whom were kings of Anshan. It becomes clear from the Cyrus Cylinder that the ancestors of Cyrus, starting with his great-grandfather, ruled Anshan. Anshan was a small kingdom during the ascendency of the Medes to power. Once the Median kingdom established itself as the dominant power on the Iranian plateau, northern Mesopotamia, and eastern Asia Minor, Anshan became a tributary of the Median state, and its rulers acted as the vassals of Median kings.

It was only after 559 or 558 BCE, when Cyrus II ascended the throne of Anshan, that the relationship between the Persians and their Median overlord began to undergo a major transformation. Sometime around 554/553 or 550/549 BCE, Cyrus revolted against the authority of the Median king Ashti Vega, who appears in Herodotus's history as Astyages. After several confrontations in which he was initially unsuccessful, Cyrus finally managed to defeat the Medes and seize their capital. From this union between the kingdom of Anshan and the much larger and more prosperous kingdom of Media, Cyrus's empire was founded. The inscription on the Cyrus Cylinder demonstrates that during the reign of Cyrus, the name of the region from which the Persian king had hailed was Anshan and that the name Parsa (Persis, Persia) was introduced sometime later.

In 1961, a team under the direction of Fereydun Tavalloli from the Archaeological Service of Iran excavated an archaeological site called

Tal-e Malyan in Fars province of Iran. Tal-e Malyan is located 22 miles (36 kilometers) northwest of the city of Shiraz, the capital of Fars. In 1971, an American archaeological team led by William Sumner from the University of Pennsylvania and Ohio State University began their excavation of Tal-e Malyan. This team worked for several seasons on the site until 1978, when their work was interrupted by the onset of the Iranian Revolution. Based on the study of the excavated Elamite-inscribed bricks and tablets, particularly a building brick of the Elamite monarch Hatelutus-Insusinak, Tal-e Malyan has been identified as the site of the ancient city of Anshan.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great

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Arachosia

Arachosia was the name given by classical authors to an Iranian-populated region in present-day southern Afghanistan whose most important city today is Qandahar (Kandahar). The geographical

boundaries of Arachosia are unclear, but it is generally believed that the province takes its name from its principal river, the present-day Argandab, a tributary of the Helmand River. The longest river in present-day Afghanistan, the Helmand rises in the Hindu Kush Mountains of northern Afghanistan and empties into Hamun-e Helmand Lake near Zabol at the Afghan–Iranian border. In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, the region is called Harakhushti (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 1.13). In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, the Persian Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) mentions Arachosia, which he called Harauvatish, as one of the provinces that came into his possession after he seized the throne in 522 BCE (Kent: 116–134). Arachosia is also mentioned in one of Darius's inscriptions as a source of ivory, which was used in the construction of the king's royal palace in Susa, one of the capitals of the Achaemenid dynasty (Kent: 144). The Arachosians served in the armies of the last Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, when he fought Alexander the Macedon. When Darius III was defeated and the region came under Macedonian rule, Alexander appointed one of his generals, Meno, as the governor of Arachosia. When Meno died in 325 BCE, another of his commanders, Sibyrtius, became the satrap of the province. Arachosia came under Seleucid rule for a short time before it was seized by Demetrius, ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in today's northern Afghanistan. The region was probably incorporated into the emerging Arsacid (Parthian) Empire (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) during the reign of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE). The reigns of the successors of Mithridates I, Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE) and Artabanus I (r. 128–124/123 BCE), saw Scythian groups from Central Asia invade and occupy Arachosia and the neighboring province of Drangiana (present-day Sistan-Baluchistan), which came to be known as Sakastana (the land of the Sakas) and later Sistan.

Isidore of Charax, the author of *Parthian Stations,* called Arachosia "White India" and identified it as a province of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire (Isidore of Charax: 9). After the invasion of present-day northern Afghanistan by the Iranian-speaking Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) or Tochari, the entire territory of present-day Afghanistan came under the Kushan dynasty, which originated from one of the branches within the Yüeh-chih. The Kushans established a powerful empire, which at its height stretched from Central Asia to India. In 224 CE, Ardashir I, founder of the Sasanian dynasty, defeated and killed Artabanus IV, the last Arsacid monarch, on the battlefield. In 225, Ardashir moved against the Kushans who submitted to the Sasanian monarch. This allowed the Sasanians to list the province formerly known as Arachosia as part of their newly established empire. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars province of southern Iran, Shapur I

included "Kerman, Seistan, Turan, Makuran, Paradene, Hindustan [= Sind], the Kushanshahr up to Peshawar, and up to Kashgar, Sogdiana and to the mountains of Tashkent, and on the other side of the sea, Oman," as parts and provinces of his empire in the east (Frye: 371). The name Arachosia was apparently abandoned sometime during the late Kushan or early Sasanian periods.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bisotun Inscription; Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; Shapur I

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Aria

Aria, which appears as "Haroyu" in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, and as "Haraiva" in Old Persian, was the name of an Iranian-populated province in present-day northwestern Afghanistan whose most important urban center today is the city of Herat (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Yasht, 10.14; Kent: 117, 119). The exact geographical boundaries of ancient Aria are unclear, but it is generally believed that the province was centered around the valley of the river Hari Rud. Aria was bordered by Sattagydia and Gandhara to the east; Parthia to the west; Bactria, Margiana, and Chorasmia to the north and east; and Sagartia, Drangiana, and Arachosia to the south. In his *Geography,* Strabo described Aria as a region "enclosed by mountains and in part having their habitations in the plains," which "are intersected by rivers that irrigate them" (Strabo: 11.10, 1–11.1). He identified the

main cities of Aria as Artacaena, Alexandria, and Achaia (Strabo: 11.10, 1–11.1). According to Pliny, the city of Alexandria, corresponding with today's Herat in northwestern Afghanistan, was founded by Alexander the Macedon.

In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, the Persian Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) included Haraiva or Aria in the list of the provinces that came into his possession after he seized the throne in 522 BCE (Kent: 117, 119). Herodotus also mentions Aria together with Parthia, Chorasmia, and Sogdiana as being among the 20 provinces that paid tribute to the Persian Achaemenid king (Herodotus: 3.93). The successors of Darius I, including Xerxes I and Artaxerxes II, also listed Aria among the provinces of the Achaemenid Empire (Kent: 151, 155). Arians participated in the armies of the last Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, when he fought Alexander the Macedon. Aria benefited enormously from being located on the ancient routes, which linked Mesopotamia and Iran to India, Central Asia, and China. After the fall of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BCE, Alexander the Macedon and his armies invaded and seized Aria after capturing Hyrcania and Parthia. When Alexander died in 323 BCE, his short-lived empire disintegrated into chaos and civil war. Alexander's ambitious generals fought one another as each sought to carve out a kingdom of his own. In the struggle between Eumenes and Antigonus, the governor of Aria/Drangiana joined the governors of other "Upper Satrapies" and sided with Eumenes against Antigonus (Wiesehöfer: 107). When Seleucus I, a general in Alexander's army, seized Iran between 312 and 301 BCE, Aria became a province of the Seleucid Empire. Among the early Seleucid settlements and fortresses in Iran was Soteira in Aria (Wiesehöfer: 108). As Seleucid power declined in the east, Aria became a disputed region lying between the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in present-day northern Afghanistan and the Arsacid kingdom based in northeastern Iran. During the reign of the Arsacid dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE) Aria prospered, as it was one of the trading centers of the famed Silk Road used by merchants and ordinary folks to travel from Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Iran to India and China. Isidore of Charax listed Aria as one of the important commercial links and supply stations on the overland trade route between Levant and India. He named the three cities of Candac, Artacauan, and Alexandria of the Arii as the three major urban centers of Aria (Isidore of Charax: 8).

Much of the territory of present-day Afghanistan became part of the Kushan Empire toward the end of the second century BCE. During Kushan rule, Aria as well as other parts of Afghanistan prospered, as the region enjoyed close trade and commercial ties with India to the south, Central Asia and China to the north and northeast, and the

Parthian Empire and Rome to the west. After the fall of the Kushan dynasty at the hands of the Persian Sasanians in 225 CE, the territory of ancient Aria was incorporated into the emerging Sasanian Empire (r. 224–651 CE). In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near present-day Shiraz in southern Iran, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, listed Harey or Aria as one of the provinces of his empire (Frye: 371).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bisotun Inscription; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Seleucus I Nicator; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Seleucids

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Azerbaijan

Known as Media Atropatene and Aturpatakan in the pre-Islamic era, Azerbaijan has been one of the most important provinces of Iran throughout its long and rich history, producing some of the most outstanding rulers, leaders, commanders, intellectuals, scientists, poets, and artists in the Iranian history. During the reign of the

Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE), Azerbaijan was an integral part of the important satrapy of Media. After the fall of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BCE, the Iranian governor and commander Atarpat (Atropates) proclaimed his independence. From this period forward, the region would be referred to by Greek and Roman authors as Media Atropatene and at times Media Minor. The Greek geographer Strabo wrote that Media was "divided into two parts." One part of it was called "Greater Media, of which the metropolis" was "Ecbatana, a large city containing the royal residence of the Median empire," and the other part was "Atropatian Media [present-day Iranian Azerbaijan], which got its name from the commander Atropates, who preserved" this "country, which was a part of Greater Media, from becoming subject to the Macedonians" (Strabo: 11.13.1). After Atropates was "proclaimed king, he organized this country into a separate state by itself, and his succession of descendants" was preserved down to the Parthian period, with his successors marrying "with the kings of the Armenians and Syrians [Seleucids] and in later times, with the kings of the Parthians" (Strabo: 11.13.1). According to Strabo, Media Atropatene was situated "east of Armenia and Matiane, west of Greater Media, and north of both" and "adjacent to the region round the recess of the Hyrcanian Sea [Caspian Sea] and to Matiane on the south" (Strabo: 11.13.2). All "regions of this country" were "fertile except the part towards the north," which was "mountainous and rugged and cold" (Strabo: 11.13.3). Media Atropatene had a harbor called "Capauta [present-day Lake Orumiyeh] in which salts" effloresced and solidified (Strabo: 11.13.2). Media Atropatene was therefore a large and powerful country that could "furnish as many as ten thousand horsemen and forty thousand foot-soldiers" (Strabo: 11.13.2).

As the Seleucid authority waned, the Arsacid dynasty began to expand its territory from northeastern Iran into central and western Iran. The Arsacid state was transformed from a kingdom in northeastern Iran during the reign of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), who imposed his authority over western and southwestern Iran sometime after 148 BCE. The emergence of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire did not mean, however, that Media Atropatene lost its autonomy and the ruling family of the province lost its power. Like several other regions and provinces in Greater Iran, Media Atropatene continued to enjoy a large measure of autonomy and self-rule. Its policies and survival, however, depended on its complex relationship with its two powerful neighbors, namely the Armenians and the Parthian Arsacids (Strabo: 11.13.2).

In 36 BCE, Media Atropatene was invaded by the Roman general Mark Antony. He laid siege to the capital of the province, Phraata, but

failed to capture it despite strong support from the king of Armenia, who allowed the Romans to use his country as a base of operations against the Arsacids. After repeated attacks and raids by the Parthian armies, which targeted Antony's rear guard, the Romans were forced to withdraw and flee to Armenia. The ruler of Armenia, Artavasdes, tried to use his alliance with Mark Antony to protect his autonomy from the Arsacids, but when Antony withdrew his forces and moved them west in anticipation of his impending confrontation with Octavian (Augustus), Artavasdes was defeated and captured in 30 BCE. Though he managed to escape prison and reach Rome, he failed to regain his throne even with support from Emperor Augustus. The Roman emperor tried to use the son of Artavasdes, Ariobarzanes II, as an instrument of Roman presence in western Iran by appointing him king of Armenia, but the reign of this local dynasty came to a sudden and final end when the son of Ariobarzanes II, Artavasdes, was murdered. The Arsacid king Artabanus II, who ruled from 10/11 to 38 CE, tried to increase the power of the central government in various provinces of his empire. After signing a peace treaty with the Romans in 18 or 19 CE, the Arsacid monarch embarked on a policy of centralizing power by removing vassal kings and replacing them with the princes of the Arsacid royal family, particularly his own sons and brothers. Media Atropatene was among the provinces where the authority of the Arsacid monarch was consolidated by appointing one of the sons of the king as the new governor. This practice continued during the remainder of Arsacid rule. Thus, the Arsacid king Vologeses I, who ruled from 51 to 76/80 CE, appointed his brother Pacorus as the ruler of Media Atropatene.

In 224 CE Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, defeated the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV. The death of the Arsacid king on the battlefield signaled the end of the Arsacid monarchy and the beginning of Sasanian rule, which lasted until 651. Ardashir quickly established his rule over the provinces previously held by the Arsacids. Azerbaijan was one of the provinces to be incorporated into the Sasanian Empire. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in Fars province of southern Iran, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, included Azerbaijan as one of the provinces of his empire. Throughout the long period of Sasanian rule, Azerbaijan held a uniquely important political, military, cultural, and religious position within the Sasanian Empire. The district of Shiz, known today as Takht-e Soleyman in western Azerbaijan, was home to Adur Gushnasp, one of the three most sacred fires of pre-Islamic Iran. Housed in its own temple, each of the three great sacred fires of Iran was identified with one of the three social estates, namely priests, warriors, and the members of the third estate, the peasant farmers and

artisans. While Adur Borzen Mihr was designated as the fire of the third estate or the laboring classes (i.e., peasant farmers and artisans) and while Adur Farnbag was revered as the holy fire of the priests, Adur Gushnasp was designated as the sacred fire of the warrior class. Because the Sasanian kings themselves belonged to the warrior caste, Adur Gushnasp was considered to be the sacred fire of the royal family. After ascending the throne, Sasanian kings displayed their devotion by making a pilgrimage to the fire on foot. They also bestowed lavish gifts upon the temple housing the sacred fire. The importance of the fire reached new heights during the fifth, sixth, and early seventh centuries. Before departing for a military campaign against the Byzantine Empire, the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE) visited the fire to pay homage. When the victorious king of kings returned from his successful campaign, he expressed his devotion once again by bequeathing to the sanctuary an enormous quantity of spoils he had collected from his campaign. The Sasanian king Khosrow II Parvez (r. 590–628 CE) also visited the fire to pray for victory against the Byzantine armies. Upon his return, he too donated to Adur Gushnasp a handsome share of the treasures he had seized during the campaign. In 623 CE, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius invaded Sasanian territory and sacked Adur Gushnasp, where his forces destroyed the temple's altars, set the building ablaze, and killed every living creature to be found there. The sacred fire, however, was carried to safety and later reinstalled. The magnificent temple complex continued to function for several more centuries before its fire was extinguished at an unknown date.

The Sasanian Empire began to decline rapidly after the murder of Khosrow II in 628. After the Sasanian armies were defeated by invading Arabs in 636 and 642, Azerbaijan fell into the hands of Muslim armies. After the establishment of Islamic rule, Azerbaijan continued to play a prominent role in the history of Iran. For example, in the early 9th century the province was home to the Iranian revolutionary hero Babak Khoramdin, who organized a popular mass movement against the ruling Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad. In the 15th century Azerbaijan served as the home of the Safavid family, which in 1501 unified the Iranian state after centuries of fragmentation and disunity.

See also: *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Media, Medes, and the Median Empire; Sasanian Empire

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Bactria

Bactria (Old Persian: Bakhtrish) was an Iranian-populated region lying between the Hindu Kush mountain range to the south and the Oxus River (Amu Darya) to the north. The core territory of ancient Bactria corresponded with present-day northern Afghanistan, incorporating the present-day provinces of Takhar, Konduz, Baghlan, Balkh, Samangan, Jowzjan, and Sar-e Pol. Bactria was mentioned in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, as "Bakhdhi," "the fourth of the good lands and countries," which the great god Ahura Mazda had created (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 1.7). In the legendary history of Greater Iran, Bactria was identified as the home of the Kayanian dynasty (Biruni: 100, 12; 186, 19; 220, 20). When the Kayanian monarch Kay Khosrow is assembling his forces to march against Iran's most formidable foe, King Afrasiyab of Turan, the Iranian forces are ordered to congregate on a plain in the Balkh province (Ibn Balkhi: 45). The Kayanian monarch Kavi Vishtaspa (Goshtasp) is identified as the first ruler to welcome the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) to his court. After Goshtasp converts to Zoroastrianism and agrees to act as the prophet's patron and protector, the members of the royal family and the royal court also convert to the new religion. In the legendary history of Iran, several kings have been credited with the actual construction of the city of Balkh, the principal urban center of Bactria. One source, *Sharestanha-ye Eranshahr,* attributed the construction of the city, which was originally called Navazak, to Esfandiyar, a legendary hero of ancient

Iran and the crown prince of King Goshtasp (Markwart: 10, 34–38). Several historians of the Islamic era such as Tabari associated Balkh with the Kayanian monarch Kay Kavus, while others, including the author Ibn al-Balkhi, claimed that Balkh was constructed by King Lohrasb, the father of Goshtasp and the grandfather of Esfandiyar (Tabari: 2.421; Ibn Balkhi: 48). Although the existence of the Kayanian kingdom itself cannot be validated, archaeological discoveries indicate that in great antiquity Bactria was home to large and prosperous urban and rural communities defended by numerous fortresses.

Figure of a man, Achaemenid Persian gold metalwork, fifth/fourth centuries BCE, discovered in Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan. As one of the most important centers of Iranian civilization, Bactria played a significant role in the history of Greater Iran. The area of Bactria corresponded with the region lying north of the Hindu Kush mountain range and south of the river Oxus (Amu Darya). (Universal History Archive/Getty Images)

Bactria was incorporated into the Persian Achaemenid Empire during the reign of Cyrus II the Great (r. 559/558–530 BCE) and was mentioned in the inscription of the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) at Bisotun in western Iran as one of the provinces of his empire. The archaeological evidence indicates that during the Achaemenid period, Bactria was dotted by towns, villages, and fortresses. A prosperous region, it enjoyed a central position on the trade routes that linked Iran and India to Central Asia and China. The wealth of Bactria's ruling families is demonstrated by the beauty and magnificence of the exquisite gold and silver objects in the so-called Oxus Treasure collection, which were unearthed sometime between 1877 and 1880 and are presently held at the British Museum (Curtis: 65).

Bactrian officials and commanders played an important role in the Achaemenid Empire. Bactrian army units constituted an important component of the Achaemenid forces, and they were mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus in the context of the military campaigns of the Persian king Xerxes I in Greece. During the last battle between Alexander the Great and the Achaemenid king Darius III at Arbela in 331 BCE, the Bactrian cavalry units nearly turned the tide of the battle against the Macedonians. When Darius was finally defeated, he and several of his commanders fled east in a desperate attempt to rally Bactria and Sogdiana against the Macedonians. Before reaching his destination, however, Darius III was murdered by Bessus, the governor of Bactria, who proclaimed himself king of Asia and assumed the royal title of Artaxerxes. Bessus organized his Bactrian, Sogdian, and Scythian units into a formidable force and adopted a scorched-earth policy, denying the Macedonian armies access to food and water. Soon, however, he was betrayed by his generals and handed over to Alexander, who humiliated him by cutting off his nose and the tips of his ears in public before sending him to his death (Arrian: 4.7–8). After Bactria was pacified by the Macedonians, Alexander used it as a territorial base for his military operations in Sogdiana, the territory north of the Oxus and south of Jaxartes. To ensure the complete subjugation of Bactria and Sogdiana, Alexander forced 30,000 Bactrians and Sogdians to join his army as hostages. According to the historians of Alexander's campaigns, the Macedonian conqueror also settled many of his officers and soldiers in colonies throughout Bactria.

The Macedonian general Seleucus I, who founded the Seleucid state in 312 BCE, incorporated Bactria into his newly established empire. He later appointed his son and designated successor, Antiochus, as the governor of the eastern provinces and assigned him the double task of defending his empire against nomadic incursions

from Central Asia as well as from the Mauryan Empire, which ruled present-day Afghanistan south of the Hindu Kush mountain range. As the power of the Seleucid state based in Syria declined during the reign of Antiochus II (r. 261–247 BCE), Bactria proclaimed its independence.

The Greco-Bactrian kingdom (250–125 BCE) was founded by Diodotus, the satrap of Bactria, who used the conflict among the contenders to the Seleucid throne to proclaim his independence. As the power and authority of the Seleucid state based in Syria waned, another Iranian-populated province in the east, namely Parthia, also revolted. In 209 BCE, the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III marched to Iran to impose his authority over the eastern provinces of his empire. He first forced the Arsacids, who had established themselves in northeastern Iran, to accept his suzerainty. He then led his forces to northern Afghanistan and laid siege to Bactra (Balkh), the capital of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. The Seleucid army failed to capture the Bactrian capital, and in return for accepting the nominal sovereignty of the Seleucid king, the ruler of Bactria, Euthydemus, was allowed to retain his position and title. Originally, the Greco-Bactrian kingdom was bordered in the west by Parthia, in the east by the rugged mountains of Badakhshan, in the south by the Hindu Kush mountain range, and in the north by the Oxus River (Amu Darya). These frontiers, however, changed dramatically as the kingdom expanded its territory, seizing Sogdiana to the north of the Oxus and capturing Taxila in the present-day Punjab province of northwestern Pakistan. It was during the rule of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom that Buddhism spread widely in the eastern provinces of Greater Iran. The Greco-Bactrian kingdom entered an era of civil war and strife after Eucratides (r. 170–145 BCE) overthrew the reigning king, Demetrius I, and thereby started a long conflict with the descendants of Euthydemus, who remained in power in India.

As the Greco-Bactrian kingdom began to lose its unity and power, it became vulnerable to attacks by nomadic tribes from Central Asia. The fall of the kingdom in 125 BCE resulted in the creation of several small principalities under the control of various branches of the Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) or Tochari nomads. The Yüeh-chih were a branch of the Iranian Scythian tribes who were moving from the Tarim Basin in present-day western China to Transoxiana. The Greek author Strabo wrote that Bactria was captured by nomadic groups, including the Asiani, the Tochari, and the Saraucae (Strabo: 11.511). The Yüeh-chih moved from Central Asia first to Bactria in the second century BCE. They divided their newly won territory into several principalities. Nearly a century later, the Kushan prince Kujula Kadphises unified all the Yüeh-chih branches under his rule. From Bactria the Kushans

crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and occupied Gandhara. The occupation of Gandhara, southeast of the Hindu Kush Mountains, allowed the Kushans by the middle of the first century CE to extend their power to the Indus River Valley and the city of Taxila. From here, the Kushans moved farther south to the region of the Yamuna (Jamuna) River in the present-day northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where they chose the city of Mathura as their southern capital. By the beginning of the second century CE, the Kushans, along with the Romans, Parthians, and Chinese, were among the four most powerful states in the world. They ruled vast territories in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The Kushan state incorporated what is now Tajikistan, a large part of Uzbekistan, parts of Kyrgyzstan and southern Turkmenistan, almost all of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a portion of eastern Turkestan, the entirety of northern India, and parts of eastern and central India.

The Kushans practiced ancestor worship. Claiming that they came from divine origin, the Kushan rulers erected family temples where the divine ancestors of the ruling dynasty were worshipped. As rulers of a highly diverse population, however, the Kushans were obligated to act as the protectors of the popular cults and religions of the sedentary population they had conquered in Bactria, Gandhara, and northern India. Several Kushan kings became adherents of Zoroastrianism and Mithraism, while others acted as defenders of Buddhism. The most powerful and influential of all Kushan monarchs, Kanishka I, was a great defender of Buddhism, but he also adopted a highly tolerant attitude toward non-Buddhist religious communities, including the Zoroastrians, Hindus, and those who worshipped Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. The coins of the Kushan emperor Kanishka incorporate Buddha, the deities of the Indo-Scythian empire, the main Zoroastrian deities, and Greek gods, thus displaying a high level of eclecticism.

Kanishka expanded his empire into Central Asia and seized the important urban centers of the region, including those on the southern and western rims of the Tarim Basin. This conquest allowed the Kushans to benefit from the lucrative trade on the Silk Road while at the same time establishing direct commercial links with China. Bactria, situated between India to the south and Central Asia to the north, was one of the principal beneficiaries of Kushan expansionism. The Kushan rule also provided Buddhist monks with direct access to the urban centers of Central Asia, where they built monasteries and spread the teachings of their religion. Today, the ruins of many monuments that the Kushan kings erected, such as the religious complex of Sorkh Kotal and the fortress built on the ruins of Ai Khanom, can be found in northern Afghanistan. To the east, the

Kushans established close diplomatic ties with Rome in an attempt to isolate the Parthian state in Iran and Mesopotamia. Their plan was probably to divert the flow of precious goods, particularly silk from Iran, to ports on the Indian Ocean, where ships carrying Chinese, Central Asian, and Indian goods could sail to Rome without any hindrance and intervention from a third party.

The name Bactria was abandoned sometime during the reign of the Kushan Empire and replaced by Tokharestan, or "the land of the Tochari." The Persian Sasanians, who overthrew the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty in 224 CE, forced the Kushans to submit to their authority in 225 CE. Much of the Kushan territorial possessions in present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan came under the suzerainty of the Sasanian royal house. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in southern Iran, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, listed Kushanshahr, or the country of Kushans, as one of the provinces of his newly established empire (Frye: 371). After the conquest of ancient Bactria by the Sasanians, Tokharestan constituted the heartland of the newly formed province of Kushanshahr, to which the Persian monarchs customarily appointed one of their sons as governor, carrying the title "Kushan Shah."

During the fifth century CE, Sogdiana, Bactria/Tokharestan, and parts of the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan were overrun by the Hephthalites, a new nomadic group invading present-day Afghanistan and northeastern Iran from Central Asia. The Hephthalites established a powerful empire, which at its zenith extended from Central Asia to northern India. They repeatedly defeated Sasanian armies during the reign of Peroz (r. 459–484 CE) and imposed humiliating treaties on the Persians, who struggled desperately to protect their empire. It took nearly a century and a close alliance with the Western Turk state in Central Asia before the Sasanians could defeat and destroy the Hephthalite kingdom and reestablish their rule over the territory south of the Oxus River during the reign of Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Oxus Treasure; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Kushan Empire

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Chorasmia

Chorasmia (Old Persian: Huwarazmish; New Persian: Khwarazm) was a region on the lower Oxus River delta south of the Aral Sea. Since ancient times Central Asia was divided into several distinct geographical regions, each characterized by its own unique setting, history, culture, and socioeconomic organization. One such region was ancient Chorasmia, which in Islamic times was referred to as Khwarazm. Located as it was on the lower reaches of the Oxus River south of the Aral Sea and north of the Karakum Desert, the region served as a nexus of trade and commerce between South and

Southwest Asia and the Eurasian steppe. Today the territory of ancient Chorasmia is divided among the three Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.

Chorasmia played an important role in the religious, cultural, and political history of ancient Iran. From ancient times down to the 12th century, the population of Chorasmia was of Iranian ethnic stock. They spoke an eastern Iranian language called Chorasmian. Until the 11th century, Chorasmia was ruled by local Iranian dynasties. The scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni (973–1048/1050 CE), who himself hailed from the region, traced its history back to the reign of Iran's legendary Kayanian dynasty, which included such prominent kings and personages as Kay Qobad; Kay Kavus; his son, Prince Siyavash; the latter's son, Kay Khosrow; Lohrasp; and Goshtasp.

The first recorded mention of Chorasmia appears in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. In fact, some scholars of pre-Islamic Iran have identified Chorasmia as the ancient homeland of the Iranian people (Old Iranian: Airyanem Vaejah; Middle Persian: Eranvej) and the birthplace of Zoroastrianism. This assertion has, however, been rejected in recent scholarship. Excavations conducted by Soviet archaeologists indicate that before its conquest by the Persian Achaemenid Empire (r. 550–330 BCE), Chorasmia was home to northern Iranian Scythian nomadic groups who had established an independent kingdom. The Greek author Strabo identified Chorasmia as the home of the Massagetae, who constituted a branch of Scythian tribes.

Chorasmia was conquered by Cyrus II the Great (r. 559/558–530 BCE), founder of the Achaemenid dynasty. The exact date of this conquest is unknown. Cyrus appointed his second son, Bardiya, as governor of the northeastern provinces of his empire, including Chorasmia. In his long inscription at Bisotun near the city of Kermanshah in present-day western Iran, the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) listed Chorasmia as one of the provinces of the Persian Empire (Kent: 117, 119). In another inscription from the reign of Darius I at the city of Susa in southwestern Iran, the Persian king identified Chorasmia as the supplier of the turquoise used to decorate his palace at Susa, which served as the winter capital of the Achaemenid state (Kent: 143–144). The Chorasmians are depicted on the walls of Apadana, the great reception hall of Persepolis, as bearing tribute to the Persian king. The Greek historian Herodotus mentions the Chorasmian units fighting in the army of Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE) (Herodotus: 7.66). The last mention of Chorasmia during Persian Achaemenid rule dates back to an inscription from the reign of Artaxerxes II (r. 405–359 BCE) (Kent: 155–156). Several scholars have maintained that Chorasmia had gained its independence from the

Achaemenid Empire by the end of the fifth century BCE.

After the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, Alexander and his Macedonian army invaded Central Asia. Chorasmia resisted the foreign invaders and joined forces with Bessus, the Persian governor of Bactria (present-day northern Afghanistan) who had proclaimed himself as the new Achaemenid king, assuming the royal name of Artaxerxes V. When Bessus was defeated, the anti-Macedonian resistance continued under one of his commanders, Spitaman (Spitamenes), who hailed from Sogdiana, the region lying between the Oxus and Jaxartes Rivers. Eventually the Chorasmians sent a delegation to Alexander and declared their submission to him. However, the Chorasmian king refused to go in person to Alexander's camp. Thus, it seems that during the reign of Alexander and the succeeding Seleucid dynasty, Chorasmia enjoyed a high level of autonomy if not full independence (Wiesehöfer: 108).

In the second half of the second century BCE, a new Iranian state under the Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) was founded in Parthia south of Chorasmia in present-day southwestern Turkmenistan and northeastern Iran. The Parthian Arsacids enjoyed some political control over Chorasmia during the first century and a half of their rule. However, this control was short-lived because Chorasmia, Sogdiana, and Bactria were invaded repeatedly by nomadic groups from Central Asia. These nomadic invasions destroyed the Greco-Bactrian kingdom centered in northern Afghanistan and eventually pushed southward all the way to northern India. The Kushan Empire was created by these Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) or Tochari nomads who invaded and seized present-day Afghanistan and large territories in India. Parts of Chorasmia and even portions of present-day northeastern Iran may have come for a time under the suzerainty of this empire. Once again, however, Chorasmia gained its independence. Our knowledge of Chorasmia after this period is scanty in the extreme. It seems, however, that Chorasmia retained its independence from both the Parthian and Kushan Empires. Furthermore, the relationship between Chorasmia and the Sasanian state (r. 224–651 CE), which defeated both the Parthian and Kushan states between 224 and 225, is unknown. Sometime in the early fourth century CE, a new dynasty called the Afrighids (r. 305–995 CE) established rule over Chorasmia, and its leader assumed the title of Khwarazm Shah (Shah or King of Khwarazm). After the fall of the Persian Sasanian Empire in 651 CE, Chorasmia and the rest of Central Asia were conquered by the Arabs who seized Chorasmia around 712 CE. The Afrighids survived the arrival of Islam, however, and maintained their power by collaborating with the Arab invaders. They were overthrown almost three centuries later, in 995 CE, by a rival family, the Ma'munids. The

Ma'munids were initially vassals to the Samanid state, which ruled much of the southern region of Central Asia as well as northern Afghanistan and northeastern Iran from their capital, the city of Bokhara in present-day Uzbekistan. When Samanid rule came to an end in 999, however, the Ma'munids came gradually under the domination of the newly emerging Ghaznavid dynasty. To prevent an invasion of his kingdom, the Ma'munid ruler Abul Abbas ibn Ma'mun asked for the hand of the sister of Mahmud, the powerful ruler of the Ghaznavid Empire. The opponents of Abul Abbas denounced his conciliatory policy toward Mahmud and revolted. The murder of Abul Abbas by the rebels provided Sultan Mahmud with a convenient justification to invade Khwarazm. Ghaznavid forces defeated the rebels and overthrew the Ma'munids. Khwarazm was pacified and incorporated into the Ghaznavid Empire. A Ghaznavid slave commander, Altuntash, was appointed governor of the province and given the title Khwarazm Shah. The ethnic and linguistic composition of Khwarazm underwent a fundamental transformation in the 11th century as Turkic nomadic groups invaded and settled in the region.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Oxus Treasure; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacids

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Elymais

An independent and at times semi-independent vassal kingdom centered in southwestern Iran in the present-day province of Khuzestan. The exact date for the formation of this kingdom is unknown, but scholars have suggested that it was most probably founded sometime in the second century BCE and lasted until 221 CE. The exact boundaries of this kingdom are also uncertain. In his multivolume *Geography,* the Greek author Strabo identified Elymais as a land located to the northeast of Susiana and Babylonia and bordering Media and the Zagros region of present-day western Iran. Fertile areas of Elymais were inhabited by farmers, while the mountainous parts of the country were home to "soldiers, mostly bowmen," and since the rugged areas were extensive, the land could furnish "a large military force" (Strabo: 16.1.18). Strabo described the inhabitants of Elymais, the Elymaeans, as a "predatory people" who relied "on the ruggedness of their mountains" and waged wars against their neighbors, including the Susians (Strabo: 15.3.12). Scholars have debated whether the Elymaeans were an Iranian-speaking group or the direct descendants of the ancient Elamites who in ancient times ruled this region of the Near East in the period before the establishment of Median and Achaemenid dynasties (Hansman: Elymais). The Elymaeans worshipped non-Iranian Semitic gods and were therefore closer in religious belief and cultural practices to the ancient Assyrians, Babylonians, and Elamites.

The Elymaeans are not mentioned in the historical accounts of Alexander and his campaigns. They do, however, appear as minor players in the history of the late Seleucid kingdom, which ruled Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran and Asia Minor from its capital in Antioch. As the Seleucid state began to weaken, various governors and local rulers proclaimed their independence. Sometime in 220 or 219 BCE, Molon, the Seleucid governor of Media, raised the flag of rebellion against his royal master, Antiochus III. Molon attacked Susa

in southwestern Iran and tried to seize Babylonia in present-day southern Iraq. As he pushed south and southwest he received support from the ruler of Elymais, but his revolt failed (Strabo: 16.1.17; Hansman: Elymais). In 189 BCE, the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Roman Republic. According to the Treaty of Apamea, which he was forced to sign in 188 BCE, Antiochus renounced his claims to all territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send a group of hostages, including his own son, the future Antiochus IV, to Rome; to pay a heavy war indemnity; and to surrender his fleet and war elephants. To raise the funds, Antiochus was forced to pay the Romans he went to pillage Elymais in 187 BCE. The Seleucid ruler had heard that the temple of Bel in Elymais contained a large stockpile of silver and gold. To justify his raid, Antiochus accused the Elymaeans of initiating hostilities against him. This raiding trip was ill-starred. The Seleucid monarch was killed near Susa in southwestern Iran by the local population shortly after he had pillaged the temple of Bel. Antiochus III's successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE), imitated his father by trying to rob the temple of Artemis-Nanaia in Elymais, but this campaign also failed, and the Seleucid monarch was forced to retreat to Media in western Iran. He eventually died in Gabae (modern-day Isfahan) in present-day central Iran. Sometime in 148 or 147 BCE, the Arsacid monarch Mithridates I attacked and captured Media. From Media, a Parthian army invaded and occupied Mesopotamia. In 140 BCE, the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II, who had become alarmed by the conquests of Mithridates I, organized an army and marched into Mesopotamia to counter the Parthian threat. Troops from several regions of present-day southern and southwestern Iran, including Elymais, joined Demetrius II. The Elymaean forces attacked Characene, a small kingdom at the head of the Persian Gulf in present-day southern Iraq and Kuwait, that had declared its independence from the Seleucid state. The decision to join Demetrius II proved to be disastrous for Elymais. Demetrius II was defeated and captured by a Parthian army that sent him as a prisoner to their king, Mithridates I, in Hyrcania (modern-day Gorgan) in northern Iran. The Elymaean king who had joined the Seleucid king also suffered a humiliating defeat, and his kingdom was conquered (Strabo: 16.1.18; Justin: XLI.VI). Elymais remained under the direct rule of the Parthian dynasty until the death of Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE). After the death of Mithridates II and the eruption of recurrent civil wars among contenders to the Arsacid throne, Elymais regained a semi-independent and at times fully independent status. This independence was demonstrated by the efforts of some of the Elymais kings to

conduct an independent foreign policy and negotiate treaties and alliances with various powers, including Rome. In 65 BCE, an Elymaean monarch approached the Roman general Pompey and extended an offer of friendship with Rome. In 36 CE, the Elymaeans formed an alliance with the Arsacid prince Tiridates III, who had invaded Mesopotamia in hopes of removing the Arsacid monarch Artabanus II from the throne. Despite the support from the Roman emperor Tiberius and assistance from the Elymaeans, Tiridates failed in his campaign, and Artabanus regained Mesopotamia. In 117 CE when the Roman emperor Trajan invaded the Parthian Empire, the Elymaeans lent their support to the Roman armies. Aside from the coins of several kings of Elymais, two Elymaean rulers are mentioned on rock inscriptions at Tang-e Sarvak in eastern Khuzestan province in present-day southwestern Iran. Another inscription at Susa, dating back to 215 CE, mentions a certain Khwasak as the governor of Susa under the suzerainty of the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV (r. 213–224 CE).

The fall of the Arsacid dynasty in 224 also sealed the fate of the semi-independent kingdom of Elymais. In 221 Ardashir, a Persian vassal who ruled in Fars in southern Iran, revolted against his overlord, the Arsacid monarch Artabanus IV. The last semi-independent ruler of the Elymaeans, Orodes, was asked by the Arsacid monarch to quell Ardashir's rebellion. When the battle was joined, Ardashir defeated Orodes and occupied Elymais and its major cities. Elymais lost its independence and was incorporated into the newly emerging Sasanian Empire. The new Sasanian monarchy founded by Ardashir reversed the decentralized political system, which prevailed during the long reign of the Arsacid dynasty. With centralization of absolute power in the hands of Ardashir and his successors, semi-independent kingdoms and their ruling families, including Elymais, lost their autonomy.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus IV; Mithridates I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; *Peoples:* Arsacids

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Fars (Parsa, Persis)

A region as well as a province in present-day southern Iran that served as the birthplace for two of ancient Iran’s ruling dynasties, namely the Achaemenids (r. 550–330 BCE) and the Sasanians (r. 224–651 CE). The name of the province was Parsa in Old Persian. Before the establishment of the Persian Achaemenid state, much of western Fars was ruled by the Elamites. In the first half of the sixth century BCE, small kingdoms were emerging. One of these was the kingdom of Anshan. In his clay cylinder, Cyrus II the Great did not call himself the king of Parsa or Persia but rather the ruler of Anshan. He also stated that his father Cambyses (Kambujiya), his grandfather Cyrus I (Kurush), and his great-grandfather Teispes (Chishpish) were also all kings of Anshan. During the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, Fars became the home of Iranian groups who gradually displaced the indigenous Elamite population and established their own kingdoms. The kingdom of Anshan, which was ruled by Cyrus II the Great, his father Cambyses I, and his grandfather Cyrus I was located in Fars. These kings of Anshan were the vassals of the Medes who ruled their empire from Hagmatana (Greek: Ecbatana) in present-day western Iran. During the reign of Cyrus II, the Persians expanded their small kingdom and established a powerful state, which came to be known in history as the Achaemenid Empire. In creating this empire, Cyrus defeated the Medes, the Lydians, and the Babylonians. Though he spent much of his reign in military campaigns, Cyrus frequently returned to Fars. He built a capital city for his empire at Pasargadae with palaces, mansions, and gardens. Today, the most well-preserved structure of ancient Iran is Cyrus’s simple and majestic tomb at Pasargadae. Though the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) moved the capital of the empire from Pasargadae to Susa and Ecbatana, the Persian kings returned to their home province on a

regular basis. Darius I built a ceremonial capital in Fars, called Persepolis by the Greeks. Darius's successors added new palaces and audience halls to Persepolis. Achaemenid monarchs also held their investiture ceremony at Pasargadae. The tombs of all Achaemenid kings starting with Darius I were either at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis or at Persepolis itself. Another impressive structure, the tower-shaped Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (the Ka'ba of Zoroaster), was also probably built during the reign of the Achaemenid kings at Naqsh-e Rostam, opposite the royal tombs.

Fars was invaded and conquered by Alexander the Macedon and his armies, who looted Persepolis and set fire to its magnificent buildings. During the reign of the Seleucid dynasty, which came to rule Iran after 305 BCE, Fars had its own governors, who ruled as the vassals of the Seleucid monarchs and carried the title *frataraka.* Because the capital of the Seleucid state was Antioch in Syria (present-day southern Turkey), the rulers of Fars enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in administering their province, including the right to mint their own coins. The "two small hoards of coins" found through excavations at Pasargadae "have coins of Seleucus I but no later Seleucids, while the coins from Persepolis have only one Seleucid example but many *frataraka* coins" (Frye: 159). If we "follow the evidence of coins alone we could say that after Seleucus I, in Persis we find only local dynasts who issued coins" (Frye: 160). In 209, the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III embarked on an eastern campaign to reestablish his authority over Iran. One of the principal goals of this campaign was to neutralize the threat posed by the newly emerging Arsacid state, which had declared its independence in Parthia in present-day northeastern Iran. Antiochus led his army into Iran and attacked one of the capitals of the Arsacid dynasty at Hecatompylos or Sad Darvazeh (City of a Hundred Gates) in present-day Shahr-i Qumis near Damghan in northern Iran. The Parthians made a tactical retreat. They acknowledged Seleucid sovereignty and agreed to withdraw from some of their newly conquered territories. Aside from the Parthians, Antiochus also attempted to neutralize the threat posed by Euthydemus, the ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. As with the Parthians, this campaign also resulted in limited success. A Seleucid army failed to capture Bactria, and in return for accepting the nominal sovereignty of the Seleucid king, Euthydemus was allowed to retain his position and title. From Bactria, Antiochus crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and entered the Kabul Valley in present-day Afghanistan. He then moved on to Arachosia (present-day Qandahar in southern Afghanistan) and, marching through the southeastern Iranian regions of Drangiana (Sistan-Baluchistan) and Carmania (Kerman), reached

Fars. Having reestablished a network of vassal kingdoms in Iran, Antiochus assumed the Persian Achaemenid title “Great King.” His Greek subjects honored him with the title “Antiochus the Great.”

The ancient ruins of Persepolis on the plain of Marvdasht north of the city of Shiraz. Persepolis served as one of the most important ceremonial, political, and administrative centers of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty beginning in the reign of Darius I. (Jasmina/Dreamstime.com)

The Seleucid rule in Iran came to an end after the Arsacid monarch Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE) began his ambitious campaign of conquest. First, Mithridates defeated the armies of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and seized “the satrapy Turiva and that of Aspionus” (Strabo: 11.11.2). Next, Mithridates I pushed westward and conquered Media sometime in either 148 or 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia, by 141 BCE. The Arsacid forces then continued their military operations in southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia, seizing Elymais in present-day southwestern Iran and capturing the important city of Susa, which had served for nearly two centuries as the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. After converting his Parthian kingdom into an empire, Mithridates crowned himself as the king of kings at Seleucia-on-Tigris. It was most probably during this time that the Parthian capital was also transferred from Nisa in present-day southern Turkmenistan to Ctesiphon, south of today’s Baghdad in southern Iraq. The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by attacking Mesopotamia and Iran. By this time, however, the power and prestige of the Seleucid state had suffered significantly as a result of continuous

campaigns against the Ptolemaic state in Egypt and the humiliating defeat it had suffered at the hands of Roman armies in 190 BCE. The campaigns of Demetrius II against Mithridates I proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarch, who was defeated and captured by a Parthian army in 139 BCE. It was most probably during the reign of Mithridates II that the Arsacids imposed their nominal sovereignty over Fars, which continued to be ruled by its own local kings. The Arsacids allowed the provinces of their empire to be ruled by local dynasts as long as they accepted the suzerainty of the Arsacid king. By the first century CE, the dynasty of *fratarakas* in Fars had either changed or they had adopted the new title "shah." The first ruler to have adopted the title "shah" was a certain Darius (Frye: 271).

In the third century CE Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr, a district in Fars, and a vassal of the ruling Arsacid dynasty revolted against the Parthians. After defeating and killing the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV, on the battlefield, Ardashir founded the Sasanian dynasty in 224 CE. As with the Achaemenids, the Sasanians did not rule their empire from Fars. The capital of the empire was Ctesiphon in present-day southern Iraq. As testified by numerous rock reliefs, inscriptions, and buildings they left behind, however, Fars played an important role in the dynastic identity and ceremonies of the Sasanian kings. Ardashir preserved Istakhr as the most important urban center of Fars province. He built several major buildings in the southern part of the province. The rock relief celebrating his victory over Artabanus IV was also placed in Naqsh-e Rostam next to the tombs of the four Achaemenid kings Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. Ardashir's son Shapur also had his own rock reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam, the most impressive being the relief celebrating his victory over the Roman emperor Valerian. Shapur I also had a long inscription in three languages—Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek—incised on the walls of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Pasargadae; Persepolis; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; Darius I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; Shapur I

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Hyrcania

Hyrcania (Old Persian: Varkana; New Persian: Gorgan or "land of wolves") was an Iranian-populated region north of the Alborz mountain range on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea. In classical sources, the Caspian Sea was at times referred to as the Hyrcanian Sea. Because of its strategic location, Hyrcania was viewed as an important region by the dynasties that ruled Greater Iran in the pre-Islamic era. The province consisted of two distinct climatic zones: the rain forest of the Alborz northern slopes and the Gorgan plain, well watered, fertile, and close to the mountains but passing into increasingly arid steppe as the distance from the foothills increases. In his *Geography,* Strabo described Hyrcania as a large, wooded, and "exceedingly fertile" province that was "traversed by the rivers Ochus and Oxus" (Strabo: 11.7.2–3). The province was "distinguished by notable cities," among which were "Talabroce, Samariane, Carta, and the royal residence Tape," which was situated "slightly above the sea and at a distance of one thousand four hundred stadia from the Caspian Gates" (Strabo: 11.7.2). Hyrcania was rich with oak trees,

grain, and honey as well as a wide variety of animal species, including Hyrcanian tigers.

Hyrcania was an important region within the Persian Achaemenid Empire. In his inscription at Bisotun near Kermanshah in western Iran, the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) did not list Varkana (Hyrcania) as one of the provinces of his empire, but he mentioned it as a region that had revolted against him, joining Parthia (Old Persian: Parthava), which was listed as one of the provinces of the Achaemenid Empire (Kent: 122–124). This has led scholars of ancient Iran to conclude that Hyrcania was a subprovince of Parthia, a region corresponding with present-day northeastern Iran or, more precisely, the northern and western regions of Khorasan. According to Darius I, Parthia and Hyrcania revolted and joined a certain Phraortes (Fravartish) who had raised the flag of rebellion in Media (Kent: 124). Darius's father Vishtaspa (Hystaspes), who at the time was stationed in Parthia, fought the rebels in two separate battles and finally managed to suppress them (Kent: 124–127). This passage indicates that Hyrcania was directly influenced by events in Parthia to the east and Media to the southwest. Hyrcanian units fought in the Achaemenid armies. Herodotus mentions the Hyrcanians as one of the groups who fought in the armies of Xerxes I when the Persian monarch invaded Greece. Their commander was a certain Megapanus, "who afterwards became the governor of Babylon" (Herodotus: 7.62). Some Hyrcanian army officers reached the highest post in the Achaemenid army and the Achaemenid court. One Hyrcanian officer named Artabanus, who enjoyed the confidence of Xerxes I and served as the captain of the royal guard, killed his royal master in 465. Artabanus organized the assassination plot with support and assistance from Mithridates, the eunuch "who was the king's chamberlain and enjoyed his supreme confidence" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XI.69.1–6). After murdering Xerxes, Artabanus told the king's second son, Artaxerxes, that his older brother, Darius, had killed their father. Artaxerxes believed Artabanus's claim and ordered the execution of his brother. Artabanus planned to assassinate the new king and seize the throne for himself, but Artaxerxes I discovered the plot and killed Artabanus.

Given the strategic importance of the region, Achaemenid kings appointed members of the royal family as governors of Hyrcania. For example, Ochus, who would rule the Achaemenid Empire as Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE), initially served as the satrap (governor) of Hyrcania during the reign of his father, Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE). Hyrcanian units continued to serve an important role in the Achaemenid armies. Hyrcanian cavalry units are mentioned in the armies of Darius III as he fought Alexander the Macedon. According to

Curtius, Hyrcanians "had mustered a total of 6,000 horsemen of excellent quality" in the first battle between Darius III and Alexander at Issus in 333 BCE (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.2.6). They were also present at the Battle of Arbela, which was fought between Darius III and Alexander on October 1, 331 BCE, in present-day northern Iraq (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.9.5). The Greek author Arrian also mentions the Hyrcanian, Parthian, and Tapurian cavalry units in the armies of Darius III at the Battle of Gaugamela or Arbela. These forces were under the command of the governor of Parthia and Hyrcania, Phrataphernes (Arrian: 3.8, 3.11). After the defeat of the Achaemenid army at Arbela in 331 BCE, Alexander seized Susa and Persepolis. In pursuit of Darius III who had sought refuge in Ecbatana, Alexander advanced to Media, but by the time he arrived at Persia's summer capital, Darius III had fled the city. Alexander's next targets were Hyrcania and Parthia. In his account of Alexander's campaigns, Arrian described Hyrcania as a country that "lies on the left of the road to Bactria," with one side of it "bounded by high wooded hills" and its plains extending to the Caspian Sea, also called the Hyrcanian Sea (Arrian: 3.23, 5.25). As Alexander entered the province, several high-ranking Persian commanders who had served in Darius's army, including the satrap of Hyrcania and Parthia, Phrataphernes, arrived in Alexander's camp and surrendered to the Macedonian conqueror (Arrian: 3.23). Alexander continued with his march, seizing the chief Hyrcanian town of Zadracarta, "the site of the royal palace," which has been identified by some scholars as modern Gorgan, formerly known as Astarabad (Arrian: 3.23–3.26). Alexander was so intrigued by the Hyrcanian Sea (Caspian Sea) that he ordered one of his commanders to build warships from timber in the hills of Hyrcania so he could determine "what other sea it was connected with," whether "it joined the Black Sea, or whether it was merely a gulf of the great Indian Ocean . . ." (Arrian: 7.16).

After the death of Alexander and the partition of his short-lived empire among his generals, Hyrcania became a province of the Seleucid Empire, which was founded by the Macedonian commander Seleucus between 312 and 302 BCE. Seleucid rule over Hyrcania was, however, short-lived. The Seleucid control over northern and eastern Iran was extremely tenuous. For much of its reign, the capital of the Seleucids was Antioch in Syria (present-day southern Turkey), far away from northeastern Iran. The Seleucids were also frequently occupied with wars against Ptolemaic Egypt. It is not surprising that the Seleucids began to lose control over the eastern provinces of their empire after a mere half century (Strabo: 11.7.2–3).

Sometime between 250 and 239 BCE, two important rebellions erupted against the authority of the Seleucid monarchy. The satrap of

Bactria, Diodotus, and the governor of Parthia, Andragoras, revolted and proclaimed their independence. Then in 238 BCE, Arsaces (Arshak), a leader of the Parni (Aparni), a branch of the Dahae confederacy, invaded Parthia and defeated and killed its ruler, Andragoras. Not long after, Arsaces "made himself master of Hyrcania" (Justin: XLI.4.8–9). The Greek geographer and historian Strabo wrote that Arsaces was a Scythian chief who emerged as the leader of the Parni, a group within the Dahae confederacy. In his account of Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia, Arrian mentioned the Dahae (Daae) as a nomadic group living in close proximity to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in Central Asia. By 250 BCE, the Parni had established themselves on the shores of the Atrek River. A short time later in 247 BCE, Arsaces I was crowned king in Asaac. This event marked the beginning of the Arsacid era. The exact location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11).

With the conquest of Parthia in 238 BCE, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or as those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used when referring to them and their empire. The conquest of Parthia and Hyrcania by Arsaces I alarmed the Seleucid ruler, Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE), who organized a campaign to reimpose Seleucid control over eastern Iran. In 231/230 BCE, Seleucus II marched against the Arsacids. Though the Seleucid forces attacked and occupied Hyrcania, they could not hold the region for very long. The campaign was inconclusive and failed to neutralize the threat posed by Arsaces I. When the Seleucid army returned west, Arsaces restored his control over northeastern Iran. Once again during the reign of Antiochus III (r. 223–187 BCE), the Seleucids tried to reassert their suzerainty over the eastern provinces of their empire. In 209 BCE Antiochus led his army into Iran, seizing Media and using it as the base to attack Hyrcania and Parthia. The Seleucid army first attacked Hecatompylos, or Sad Darvazeh (City of a Hundred Gates), in Shar-e Qumis near present-day Damghan in northern Iran. He then crossed the Alborz mountain range into Hyrcania, seizing the capital of the province. Arsaces II, the son and successor to Arsaces I, made a tactical retreat and acknowledged Seleucid sovereignty. From Hyrcania and Parthia, Antiochus III moved east against Bactria. The Seleucid victory in Iran, however, proved short-lived.

Parthia and Hyrcania continued to serve as the territorial base from which the successors of Arsaces expanded their kingdom and eventually established a vast and powerful empire. The Arsacid monarch Phraates I, who ruled from 176 to 171 BCE, began the slow process of breaking out of the geographical confines of northeastern

Iran, extending the territory of the Parthian state to the regions lying to the south of the Alborz mountain range. The Arsacids defeated the Mardi, a tribal group who lived in the eastern regions of the Alborz, and expanded the boundaries of their state from Parthia to the lands west of the Caspian Gates. When Phraates I died, he was succeeded by his brother, Mithridates I.

Mithridates I, who ruled from 171 to 139/138 BCE, transformed the Arsacid state from a small kingdom in present-day northeastern Iran into a major empire that came to rule a vast territory extending from Central Asia to Syria. Building on his brother's military successes, Mithridates embarked on an ambitious campaign to expand the territory of the Arsacid kingdom even farther. The exact dates of Mithridates's impressive conquests are uncertain. However, it seems that his first major victory was achieved against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan. According to Strabo, the Parthians took away "the satrapy Turiva and that of Aspionus" from Eucratides, the ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom (Strabo: 11.11. 2). Mithridates I then pushed westward and conquered Media sometime in 148 or 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia, by 141 BCE. Before he could complete his conquest of Mesopotamia, however, Mithridates I was forced to shift his focus to the eastern borders of his kingdom, which had been breached by invading nomadic groups from Central Asia. In the absence of their king, Parthian armies continued their military operations in southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia, defeating the Elymaeans in southwestern Iran and seizing the important city of Susa, which had served as the winter capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by attacking Mesopotamia and Iran. The campaigns of Demetrius II against Mithridates I proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarch, who was defeated and captured by the Parthians in 139 BCE. The humiliated Demetrius was sent to Mithridates I in Hyrcania, which served as the home base and a safe retreat for the Arsacid monarch. In spirit of mercy and compassion, Mithridates treated the defeated Seleucid king "with the respect due unto a king" (Justin: XXXVIII.9.1–2). The Parthian monarch also arranged for a marriage between Demetrius and his daughter Rhodogune. Despite such gestures, Demetrius tried to escape captivity twice, but on both occasions he was captured and sent back to Hyrcania. After the defeat of the Seleucids, the Elymaeans, who had formed an alliance with Demetrius, paid a high price for their disloyalty when Parthian forces plundered their temples. Between 139 and 132 BCE, Parthian armies

swept through southwestern Iran and southern Iraq, including the important city of Babylon. After a long and successful reign of nearly 44 years, Mithridates I, who had assumed the title "great king," died in 139 or 138 BCE, leaving behind a vast and powerful empire for his successors. In his *Natural History,* Pliny wrote that the Parthians possessed "in all eighteen kingdoms," one of which was Hyrcani (Pliny: 6.29.112). In his short account of the overland trade route between the Levant and India during the reign of the Arsacid dynasty, Isidore of Charax mentioned Hyrcania as one of the provinces of the Parthian Empire lying on the main trade route beyond the Caspian Gates. The author stated that there were 11 rest stations for the traveling caravans in Hyrcania (Isidore of Charax: 7).

Hyrcanians played an important role in the political and administrative structure of the Parthian Empire. For example, a certain Hyrcanian, Himerus, served as the governor of Babylonia during the reign of the Arsacid monarch Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE). Throughout the Parthian period, Hyrcania served as a safe retreat for Arsacid monarchs who were facing a serious challenge to their rule.

During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (224–651 CE), Hyrcania, called Gorgan (the land of wolves), was a province of the Persian Empire. Gorgan was the name of the province as well as the name of the region's main urban center. The Sasanians who ruled their empire from Ctesiphon, south of modern-day Baghdad, viewed Gorgan as an important strategic region of their empire. According to the historian Tabari, after defeating the last Arsacid king, Artabanus IV, in 224, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir, embarked on the conquest of the former provinces of the Parthian Empire. Gorgan was one of the provinces that Ardeshir seized and incorporated into his kingdom (Tabari: 2.584). Ardashir's son and successor, Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242 –270/272 CE), mentioned Gorgan as one of the provinces of the Sasanian Empire in his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in southern Iran (Frye: 371). In the fifth century CE, the northeastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire were repeatedly breached by the Hephthalites, who defeated and killed the Sasanian monarch Peroz in 484 CE. The Hephthalites invaded Khorasan and may have reached the boundaries of Gorgan, but the extent of their penetration into the territory of the province is unclear. During the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE), the Sasanian armies defeated and destroyed the Hephthalites in collaboration with the Western Turk state, which had occupied the region north of the Oxus River (Amu Darya). To protect Gorgan and Khorasan from further nomadic incursions from Central Asia, Khosrow I built a defensive wall in Gorgan. The Great Wall of Gorgan, which

extended for nearly 125 miles (200 kilometers), was the second-longest wall in Asia after the Great Wall of China. In recent excavations, archaeologists from Iran and the United Kingdom have discovered a section of the wall that was buried in the Caspian Sea.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Gotarzes II; Mithridates I; Phraates I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Khwarazm. *See* Chorasmia

Parthia

An Iranian-populated region corresponding with present-day northeastern Iran. Parthia was a province of the Achaemenid Empire (r. 550–330 BCE) and after 238 BCE the home base for the newly established Arsacid dynasty, which would create a powerful empire that incorporated vast territories in present-day Iran, Central Asia, and Mesopotamia. The territory of Parthia as a province corresponded with present-day northeastern Iran or, more precisely, the northern region of Khorasan and the southern regions of Turkmenistan. The Persian Achaemenid kings, including Darius I and Xerxes I, mentioned Parthia as one of the provinces of their empire. In Old Persian, the name of the province was Parthava. In his inscription at Bisotun near Kermanshah in western Iran, the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) mentioned Parthia as one of the provinces of the Persian Empire, which had revolted against him after he seized the throne in 522 BCE (Kent: 122–124). Parthia was frequently mentioned with Hyrcania, leading scholars of ancient Iran to conclude that Hyrcania (Varkana) was administered as a subprovince of Parthia. According to Darius I, Parthia and Hyrcania revolted and joined a certain Fravartish (Phraortes), who had raised the flag of rebellion in

Media (Kent: 124). Darius's father Vishtaspa (Hystaspes), who was at the time stationed in Parthia, fought the rebels in two separate battles and finally managed to suppress them (Kent: 124–127). This passage indicates that Hyrcania was directly influenced by events in Parthia, to the east, and Media, the neighboring province to the southwest.

Parthians fought in the Achaemenid armies. Herodotus mentions Parthians as one of the groups that participated in the armies of Xerxes I when the Persian monarch invaded Greece. Their commander was a certain Artabazus (Herodotus: 7.66), who was most probably the governor of Parthia since, according to Herodotus, "the satraps led their contingents to battle" (Debevoise: 6). According to Arrian, the Parthians together with the Hyrcanians and Tapurians formed a part of the cavalry force, which Darius III, the last Achaemenid monarch, had mobilized against Alexander and his Macedonian army in the Battle of Arbela in 331 BCE. These forces were under the command of Phrataphernes, the governor of Parthia and Hyrcania (Arrian: 3.8, 3.11; Quintus Curtius Rufus: 4.12.11). After the defeat of the Achaemenid army at Arbela, Alexander seized Susa and Persepolis. In pursuit of Darius III, who had fled to Ecbatana, Alexander then advanced to Media, but by the time he arrived at the Persian summer capital, Darius III had departed the city. Alexander's next targets were Hyrcania and Parthia. Arrian described Hyrcania as a country that "lies on the left of the road to Bactria," with one side of it "bounded by high wooded hills" and its plains extending to the Caspian Sea, which was called the Hyrcanian Sea (Arrian: 3.23, 5.25). As the Macedonian conqueror entered the province, several high-ranking Persian commanders who served in Darius's army, including Phrataphernes, the satrap of Parthia and Hyrcania, arrived in Alexander's camp and surrendered (Arrian: 3.23). Alexander continued with his march, seizing the chief Hyrcanian town of Zadracarta, "the site of the royal palace," that has been identified by some scholars as modern-day Gorgan, formerly known as Astarabad, and using Parthia as a land bridge to invade Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan (Arrian: 3.23–3.26). During the short reign of Alexander, "Parthia was reunited with Hyrcania" (Debevoise: 7).

After the death of Alexander and the partition of his short-lived empire among his generals, Parthia changed hands several times before it became a province of the newly established Seleucid Empire, which was founded by Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals, after 305 BCE. Seleucids began to lose their control over the eastern provinces of their empire, however, after a mere half century (Strabo: 11.7.2–3). The incessant military campaigns against the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt exhausted the Seleucid treasury and diverted the attention of its rulers from the eastern provinces of their empire. The city of Antioch,

which served as the capital of the Seleucid kings, was situated on the western borders of the empire and a long way away from Iran and Central Asia. Sometime between 250 and 239 BCE, two important rebellions erupted against the Seleucids. Diodotus, the satrap of Bactria, and Andragoras, the governor of Parthia, revolted and proclaimed their independence. As the Seleucid Empire in the east began to disintegrate, Scythian groups from Central Asia pushed south. By 250 BCE one of these, the Parni or Aparni, had established themselves on the shores of the Atrek River. A short time later in 247 BCE, the leader of the Parni, Arsaces, was crowned as king in Asaac (Asaak). The exact location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). The Greek geographer and historian Strabo stated that Arsaces, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, was "a Scythian" who "with some of the Däae (I mean the Aparnians, as they were called, nomads who lived along the Ochus), invaded Parthia and conquered it" (Strabo: 11.9.2–3). In 238 BCE, Arsaces took advantage of the chaos in the eastern provinces of the Seleucid state and invaded and conquered Parthia. Andragoras, the ruler of Parthia, was killed, and his kingdom emerged as the new operational base for Arsaces I. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used when referring to them and their empire. Sometime after his conquest of Parthia, Arsaces also seized Hyrcania on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea (Justin: XLI.4.8–9).

The conquest of Parthia by Arsaces I alarmed the Seleucid ruler, Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE), who organized a military campaign to regain his control over eastern Iran. Arsaces I, however, fought back and scored a victory against the Seleucid forces, a momentous milestone that the Parthians would observe "with great solemnity as the commencement of their liberty" (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II was forced to return west to quell disturbances, Arsaces I used the respite as an opportunity to lay the foundation of the Parthian government, "levy soldiers, fortify castles, and secure the fidelity of his cities" (Justin: XLI.5.1). He built a city called Dara on Mount Apaortenon, which was designed and built in such a way that it did not need a "garrison to defend it" (Justin: XLI.5.1–4). During the reign of Antiochus III (r. 223–187 BCE), the Seleucids tried again to impose their authority over eastern Iran. From 209 to 205 BCE, Antiochus III embarked on an eastern campaign to destroy the Parthian Arsacid state. The Seleucid monarch attacked Hecatompylus (City of a Hundred Gates), present-day Shahr-e Qumis near Damghan in northern Iran. The Arsacid monarch Arsaces II fought the Seleucid

forces, estimated at 100,000 men and 20,000 horses, “with great bravery” but eventually made a tactical retreat and “made an alliance” with Antiochus (Justin: XLI.5). Antiochus also “found it prudent to make peace and a treaty of alliance” with the Arsacids (Debevoise: 18). Marching east from Parthia, Antiochus also attempted to neutralize the threat posed by the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. As with the Parthians, this campaign also resulted in limited success. The Seleucid army failed to capture Bactria, and in return for accepting the nominal sovereignty of the Seleucid king, Euthydemus was allowed to retain his position and title. From Bactria, Antiochus crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and entered the Kabul Valley in present-day Afghanistan. He then moved on to Arachosia (present-day Qandahar in southern Afghanistan) and, marching through the southeastern Iranian provinces of Drangiana (Sistan-Baluchistan) and Carmania (Kerman), reached Parsa or Persis, the birthplace of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, in 205 BCE. Having reestablished a network of vassal kingdoms in Iran, Antiochus assumed the Persian Achaemenid title “Great King.” His Greek subjects honored him with the title “Antiochus the Great.”

A decade after the death of Antiochus in 187 BCE, the Arsacids renewed their campaign of territorial expansion. The Arsacid monarch Phraates I, who ruled from 176 to 171 BCE, began the slow process of breaking out of the geographical confines of Parthia and Hyrcania, extending the territorial possessions of his kingdom to the regions lying to the south of the Alborz mountain range. Phraates defeated the Mardi, a tribal group who lived in the eastern regions of the Alborz, and expanded the boundaries of his kingdom to the lands west of the Caspian Gates (Justin: XLI.5). When Phraates I died, he was succeeded by his brother, Mithridates I. Mithridates I, who ruled from 171 to 139/138 BCE, transformed the Arsacid state from a small kingdom in present-day northeastern Iran into a world power, which came to rule a vast territory extending from Central Asia to Syria. Building on his brother’s military successes, Mithridates embarked on an ambitious campaign to expand the territory of the Arsacid kingdom even farther. His first major victory was achieved against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in Bactria, in present-day northern Afghanistan. According to the historian Justin, at almost the same time that Mithridates I ascended the throne of Parthia, Eucratides, the last important ruler of the Bactrian kingdom, began his reign (Justin: XLI.6.1). When conflict erupted between the two kingdoms, Mithridates emerged victorious. He defeated the Bactrian Greeks and took away “satrapy Turiva and that of Aspionus” from Eucratides (Strabo: 11.11.2). Mithridates I then pushed westward and conquered

Media sometime in 148 or 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia, by 141 BCE. Before he could complete his conquest of Mesopotamia, however, Mithridates I was forced to shift his focus to the eastern borders of his kingdom, which had been breached by invading nomadic groups from Central Asia. In the absence of their king, Parthian armies continued their military operations in southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia, defeating the Elymaeans in southwestern Iran and seizing the important city of Susa, which had served for nearly two centuries as the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by attacking Mesopotamia and Iran. The campaigns of Demetrius II against Mithridates I proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarch, who was defeated and captured by a Parthian army in 139 BCE. The humiliated Demetrius was sent to Mithridates I in Hyrcania. In a show of mercy and compassion, Mithridates treated the defeated Seleucid king with the respect due unto a king (Justin: XXXVIII.9.1–2). Mithridates also arranged for a marriage between Demetrius and his daughter Rhodogune. Despite such gestures Demetrius tried to escape captivity twice, but on both occasions he was captured and sent back to Hyrcania. After the defeat of the Seleucids, the Elymaeans, who had formed an alliance with Demetrius, paid a high price for their disloyalty when Parthian forces plundered their temples. Between 139 and 132 BCE, Parthian armies swept through southwestern Iran and southern Iraq, including the important city of Babylon. Mithridates I, who had assumed the title "Great King," died either in 139 or 138 BCE and was succeeded by his son Phraates II.

The Arsacid kings promoted trade and commerce not only within their own empire but also with foreign powers such as Rome and China. During the reign of the Arsacid monarch Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), trade between China, Iran, and Rome accelerated. Parthia benefited from being situated on the main trade route, which connected Central Asia to Iran, Mesopotamia, and beyond. In his short account of the overland trade route between the Levant and India, Isidore of Charax mentioned Parthia as one of the provinces lying on the main trade route beyond the Caspian Gates, in which there are 11 villages with stations (Isidore of Charax: 7).

During the reign of the Sasanian kings (r. 224–651 CE) Parthia became a province of the Persian Empire, which was ruled from Ctesiphon south of modern-day Baghdad. According to the historian Tabari, after defeating the last Arsacid king, Artabanus IV, in 224, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir I, embarked on the conquest of the former provinces of the Arsacid Empire. Gorgan and

Khorasan were two of the regions that Ardeshir seized and incorporated into his kingdom (Tabari: 2.584). Ardashir's son and successor, Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), mentioned Abarshahr (Aparshahr) as one of the provinces of the Sasanian Empire in his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in southern Iran. In the fifth century CE, the northeastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire were breached by the Hephthalites, who defeated and killed the Sasanian monarch Peroz in 484 CE. The Hephthalites invaded Khorasan and may have reached as far west as the boundaries of Gorgan, but the extent of their penetration into the territory of the province is unclear. During the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE), the Sasanian armies defeated and destroyed the Hephthalites in collaboration with the Western Turk state, which had occupied the region north of the Oxus. To protect Gorgan and Khorasan from further nomadic incursions from Central Asia, Khosrow I built a defensive wall in Gorgan. The Great Wall of Gorgan, which extended for nearly 125 miles (200 kilometers), was the second-longest wall in Asia after the Great Wall of China.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Mithridates I; Phraates I; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacids; Sasanian Empire; Primary Documents: Document 21

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Sogdiana

Sogdiana (Avestan: Sughdha; Old Persian: Suguda) was an Iranian-populated region in the southern regions of Central Asia. In antiquity, the territory of Sogdiana extended from the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in the south to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in the north. The Sogdian heartland consisted of the valleys of Zarafshan and the Kashka Darya. The importance of Sogdiana to the ancient Iranians is reflected in the mention of the region (i.e., Sughdha) in the *Avesta,* the

Zoroastrian holy book, where it is described as one of the good lands and countries that the great god Ahura Mazda had created, ranked second only to Airyanem Vaejah or Eranvej, the mythical homeland of the Iranian people.

One of the most important urban centers of Sogdiana was Afrasiyab, or Samarqand, which was called Maracanda by the Greeks. In antiquity, it most probably already existed as a walled city even before the establishment of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty in 550 BCE. The founder of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, Cyrus II the Great (r. 558–530 BCE), conquered Sogdiana and established the northern frontier of his empire at the Jaxartes River. The exact date of this conquest is unknown. In his inscriptions at Bisotun, Persepolis, and Naqsh-e Rostam, the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) mentioned Sogdiana as one of the provinces of the Persian Empire. In another inscription from the Achaemenid capital of Susa, Darius I stated that the lapis lazuli and carnelian used in building and decorating his palace had been brought from Sogdiana. Sogdians were also portrayed on the walls of Persepolis in southern Iran bearing gifts to the Persian king. The Greek historian Herodotus mentions the Sogdians serving in the Persian army during the reign of Darius's son Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE). As a frontier province of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, Sogdiana was ruled by the governor of Bactria, the region corresponding with present-day northern Afghanistan.

After the fall of the Achaemenid dynasty, Alexander the Great invaded Central Asia. Sogdiana resisted the foreign invaders and joined forces with Bessus, the Persian governor of Bactria who had proclaimed himself the new Achaemenid king, assuming the royal name of Artaxerxes V. When Bessus was defeated, the anti-Macedonian resistance continued under Spitaman (Spitamanes), a commander who hailed from Sogdiana and enjoyed the support of the Scythian tribes. Only after the murder of Spitaman at the hands of local tribes could Alexander pacify the region.

Sogdiana (Sogdia), the Iranian-speaking region extending from the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in the south to the river Jaxartes (Syr Darya) in the north, was one of the most important centers of Iranian culture and civilization in the pre-Islamic era. Afrasiab (Afrasiyab), outside of modern-day Samarqand, was situated on the famed Silk Road. The city played a prominent role in the intercontinental trade and commerce that linked China to Persia and Rome. (Geoff A. Howard/Alamy Stock Photo)

After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE, his generals fought over the control of the vast and short-lived empire he had left behind. After numerous battles, one of Alexander's commanders, Seleucus, managed to impose his rule over Iran, Mesopotamia, and much of Asia Minor after 305 BCE. The Seleucids, or the dynasty founded by Seleucus I, however, could not establish direct control over Sogdiana. The sheer distance between Sogdiana and the capital of the Seleucid Empire in Syria allowed a Greco-Bactrian dynasty, which relied on support from the local Greek military colonists, to impose its rule over Bactria and Sogdiana after 150 BCE.

There is little information on Sogdiana after the end of the Greco-Bactrian period. Sometime during the second century BCE, Sogdiana was invaded by nomadic groups from the north. By the beginning of the first century BCE, Sogdiana had been overrun by an Iranian-speaking people who were called Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) in Chinese and Tochari in Western sources. A branch of the Tochari would eventually establish the Kushan Empire. It was during the Kushan period that Buddhism spread throughout present-day Afghanistan and Central Asia. The most powerful and influential of all Kushan monarchs, Kanishka I, was a great defender of Buddhism, but he also adopted a

highly tolerant attitude toward non-Buddhist religious communities, including the Zoroastrians, Hindus, and those who worshipped Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.

Kanishka expanded his empire in Central Asia and seized the important urban centers of the region, including those on the southern and western rims of the Tarim Basin. This conquest allowed the Kushans to benefit from the lucrative trade on the Silk Road while at the same time establishing direct commercial links with China. Bactria and Sogdiana, situated between India to the south and Central Asia to the north, were the principal beneficiaries of Kushan expansionism. The Kushan rule also provided Buddhist monks with direct access to the urban centers of Central Asia, where they built monasteries and spread the teachings of their religion.

The Persian Sasanian dynasty overthrew the Arsacid dynasty in 224 CE and a short time later forced the Kushans to accept their suzerainty. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur II, listed Sogdiana as a province of the Sasanian Empire (Frye: 371). In the middle of the fifth century, a people called Hephthalites invaded Sogdiana and Tokharestan (formerly called Bactria). They repeatedly fought the Sasanian armies and in 484 inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Persian king of kings Peroz, killing him on the battlefield. During the reign of the Persian monarch Khosrow I (r. 531–579 CE), the Western Turk and Sasanian Empires formed an alliance against the Hephthalites. In a series of military campaigns between 560 and 563 CE, the two powers attacked the Hephthalites, with the Turk forces crossing the Jaxartes into Sogdiana and pushing the Hephthalites south, where the Sasanian forces were awaiting them. Squeezed between the Western Turks in the north and the Persian Sasanians in the south, the Hephthalite state disintegrated.

Although the two empires had collaborated on destroying their common enemy, the Western Turks and the Sasanians were soon locked in a battle over the lucrative trade on the Silk Road. The Sogdian merchants who played a central role in linking the economies of China to Central Asia, Persia, and the Byzantine Empire were now ruled by the Western Turk state. They sought permission from the Persian king of kings to sell and distribute their silk within the boundaries of the Sasanian Empire. The Persians, who suspected the Sogdian merchants as being close allies of the Turk state, turned down the request and insisted on retaining full control over the sale of silk within their territory. The conflict over control of the silk trade forced the Western Turk state to seek an alliance with the Byzantine Empire, which was the principal nemesis of the Sasanian state. The Sogdian merchants who led a delegation to Constantinople in 568–569

proposed the idea of bypassing Persian territory entirely and instead exporting the silk from China and Central Asia to Asia Minor and Byzantium through the Caucasus. The Byzantine emperor reciprocated and sent an embassy to the ruler of the Western Turk state. The alliance between the Byzantine and Western Turk Empires lasted for nearly 10 years.

After putting an end to the rule of the Turk Empire in 630 CE, the Tang dynasty in China established a loose and distant control over Central Asia as far west as Chach (modern-day Tashkent) in Uzbekistan but never managed to occupy and hold Sogdia. Samarqand was the largest and the most important urban center of Sogdia. In the seventh century CE the rulers of Samarqand held the title "Ekshid." Panjkand (Panjekent), located 31 miles (50 kilometers) east of Samarqand in present-day northwestern Tajikistan, was another important urban center of Sogdia and one of the main commercial hubs of the Silk Road. Aside from Samarqand and Panjkand, there were other independent Sogdian city-states ruled by princes who bore the title "Afshin."

After the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651, the Arab Muslims invaded Central Asia. The city of Samarqand was seized by the Arabs in 712. Local resistance to Islamization of the region was, however, strong. Sogdians revolted against the Arabs in 722, but the rebellion was suppressed in 723. Amid the destruction, the Arabs set fire to the city of Panjkand. The Sogdian ruler Dewashtich, who had sought refuge at a castle on Mount Mogh in present-day northern Tajikistan, was forced to surrender to the Arabs, who executed him.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bokhara; Samarqand; *Ancient Provinces:* Bactria; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Spitaman

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Transoxiana

The land beyond the Oxus River (Amu Darya), a region in the southern part of Central Asia situated between the two great rivers of Oxus and Jaxartes corresponding with much of the territory of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as parts of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The ancient Greeks called this region Transoxiana or "the land beyond the Oxus." In Iran's legendary history, the land north of the Oxus was called Turan. The Muslim Arabs who conquered Central Asia in the eighth century CE called the region Mawara' al-Nahr, or "the land beyond the river" (i.e., the Oxus). The Arabs called the Oxus the Jeyhun and the Jaxartes the Seyhun. The names Amu Darya and Syr Darya are both Persian.

Originating in the Pamir Mountains in the southeastern corner of Central Asia, the Oxus is formed by the convergence of the Panj and Vakhsh Rivers. Today, the Amu Darya forms a section of the border between Afghanistan and the two Central Asian republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan before it travels through Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to reach the Aral Sea. The Jaxartes, which is called Syr Darya, is formed by the confluence of the Naryn and Qoradarya Rivers in the eastern Farghaneh Valley. The river moves in a northwesterly direction through present-day Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and southern Kazakhstan before it too empties into the Aral Sea.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bokhara; Oxus Treasure; Samarqand; *Ancient Provinces:* Sogdiana

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Cultures, Calendars, and Festivals

OVERVIEW ESSAY

The entries in this chapter focus on the diverse cultures of Greater Iran and on the festivals and pastimes the ancient Iranians introduced and celebrated. The everyday life in ancient Iran was characterized by a richness of experience, which originated from its position as a crossroads of various cultures and peoples. Persian cuisine, for example, ranks among the oldest and most highly regarded culinary traditions in the world. A product of the trade, commerce, and exchange initiated along various transcontinental trade routes, it had its roots in the agrarian societies established by the earliest Iranian peoples. Magnificent Persian gardens, with plants imported from various regions of the empire, adorned the grounds of royal palaces. Smaller versions surrounded the homes of ordinary subjects. Sports, some with an origin in military training tactics, grew to be a beloved pastime. An organized educational system produced skilled statesmen and diplomats who could carry out an empire's business. From this multiplicity of traditions within the empire emerged numerous holidays and celebrations, some of which have retained their importance into the modern era.

The Zoroastrian calendar named 12 months, and each day of those months was also given a name. When the names of days and months coincided, festivals were held to mark the occasion. For example, the second day of the 11th month, the month of Bahman, was also named Bahman. Bahmanjaneh, as the day was known, was celebrated by preparing and eating a special stew of widely assorted grains, vegetables, and meats.

Mehregan (or Mehrgan), dedicated to Mithra, the god of oaths and covenants, as well as the sun god, was celebrated on the 16th day of the Iranian month of Mehr. Scholars and authors of the Islamic era have linked the celebration of this ancient Iranian feast to the legendary story of the blacksmith Kaveh and his revolt against the

brutal and oppressive King Zahak. Mehregan was especially important because it celebrated the joy of the people when they heard their new king, Fereydun, coming forward to rule. Sasanian kings of ancient Iran celebrated Mehregan by wearing a special crown upon which was engraved an image of the sun and of the wheel upon which it turned. Zoroastrians today continue to celebrate Mehregan by wearing new clothes, setting up a colorful table, and preparing sumptuous meals.

On the month and day dedicated to the veneration of water, the day of Aban (Waters) in the month of Aban, ancient Persians visited rivers, lakes, or the seashore to offer thanks and prayers to life-giving water. Through various invasions and disruptions, Persians continued to mark such ancient holidays with special foods, rituals, and festivities. Several other holidays, ancient in origin and observed across the Iranian-speaking world, were tied to the seasons, spring and fall equinoxes, and winter and summer solstices. Such holidays honored the cycles of life, death, and renewal over the course of the year. The spring equinox was the most prominent and celebrated of these. Nowruz, literally meaning "new day," is the Persian New Year. It continues to be observed with great festivity and ceremony each spring throughout the Persian-speaking world, including Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Nowruz is preceded, however, by a less well-known holiday. Chaharshanbeh Suri, the eve of the last Wednesday of the year, is marked most notably by the ancient ritual of jumping over bonfires, which have been lit to cleanse the world for the coming new year. Bonfires are also prepared to mark the midwinter religious festival of Sadeh, held to defy the dark and cold of winter and dispel the evil spirit represented by the satanic Ahriman. As with Chaharshanbeh Suri, before the beginning of Sadeh festivities members of each family participate in collecting and gathering wood, which is organized into bundles and set on fire after sunset. As the fire is lit, Zoroastrian priests, dressed in white to symbolize purity, recite verses from the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. It has been written that ancient Iranians, including the Persian kings, loved to celebrate their birthdays. On these occasions sumptuous banquets greeted invited guests, who also enjoyed the various entertainments provided them by musicians and others at the court. The art of celebration and festival, and their deep love for it, is only one of the many gifts that the ancient Persians have passed along to the modern world.

Ab, Aban, Aban Mah

The word for "water" in Persian is *āb,* and a plural form of *āb* is *ābān,* which means "waters." *Māh* is the Persian word for "month." *Abān*

māh therefore means "month of waters." Ancient Iranians revered water as one of the most essential elements of life on Earth. They recognized that plants, animals, and human beings could not live without water. In the Iranian cosmology, "water was the second of the seven creations … into which the world was divided" (Boyce: Āb I). Streams, rivers, lakes, and seas were therefore venerated, and polluting them was considered to be a sinful act.

In the *Avesta,* the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, Aban Yasht is the fifth hymn to an individual divinity, and it is the third-longest Yasht, with 131 verses (Boyce: Ābān Yašt). Although the name indicates the hymn is devoted to the waters (*ābān*), James Darmesteter writes that much of this Yasht is dedicated to the veneration of "the great goddess of waters," the celebrated Aredvi Sura Anahita (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 52). Her name appears as Aredvi Sura Anahita in the *Avesta,* as Anahita in Old Persian, as Ardvisur Anahid in Middle Persian, as Anaitis in Greek, and as Nahid in New Persian. She is "the heavenly spring from which all waters on the earth flow down" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 52). Her "fountains are on the top of the mythical mountain, the Hukairya" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 52). The great god Ahura Mazda speaks to his prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) and calls upon him to offer a sacrifice to Aredvi Sura Anahita, "the wide-expanding [as she comes down to all places] and health giving, who hates the Daevas [Demons] and obeys the laws of Ahura, who is worthy of sacrifice in the material world, worthy of prayer in the material world; the self-increasing and holy, the herd-increasing and holy, the fold-increasing and holy, the wealth-increasing and holy, the country-increasing and holy" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 1). Anahita is credited for making "the seed of all males pure," making "the womb of all females pure for bringing forth," making "all females bring forth in safety," and for putting "milk into the breasts of all females in the right measure and the right quality" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 2). The Aban Yasht also provides valuable information about Iranian mythology by enumerating the legendary heroes of Iran who worshipped Anahita and offered sacrifice to the water goddess. These include Haoshyangha (Hoshang, Hushang), Yima (Jamshed, Jamshid), Azhi Dahaka (Zahhak), Thraetaona (Ferēdun, Fereydun), Keresaspa (Garshasp), Franghrasyan (Afrasiyab), Kavi Usa (Kay Kavus), Kavi Husravah (Kay Khosrow), Tusa (Tus), Vishtaspa (Goshtasp), Zairivairi (Zarir), and Zarathustra, among others (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 21, 25, 29, 33, 37, 41, 45, 49, 53, 68, 104, 108, 112). Aban Yasht is not recited in a Zoroastrian fire temple or before a fire but only within sight of water. The same is true of the much shorter Zoroastrian hymn to water, Aban Niyayesh.

Aban Mah (Mah-e Aban), or the Month of Waters, is the eighth

month of the Zoroastrian calendar and is dedicated to paying respect and offerings to waters (Boyce: Ābān Māh). The 10th day of every month is also named Aban. The 10th day of the month of Aban is known as the Day of Aban and is celebrated by a feast known as Abanagan. The veneration of the waters became synonymous with the worship of Anahita (Anahid), the Iranian goddess of waters. Today, Zoroastrians continue to celebrate Abanagan by visiting a stream, a lake, or a seaside, where they pray and make offerings to the waters. In the solar calendar of today's Iran, Aban is the 8th month of the year.

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra; Yazatas; Primary Documents: Document 37

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Aparni

Aparni (Parni) is the Latin name for a northeastern Iranian group within the Dahae confederacy. The Dahae are believed to have been a Scythian nomadic group from Central Asia that settled in the northern regions of Iranian Khorasan, and present-day southern Turkmenistan sometime in the third century BCE. The leader of the Aparni in the middle of the third century BCE was Arshak (Arsaces), who proclaimed himself king in 247 BCE in Asaac, where a temple stood, complete with its everlasting fire. There is no information on the exact location of Asaac, and archaeologists have not been able to identify the site, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). The year 247 BCE marks the beginning of the Arsacid era. Arsaces and his armies attacked and seized the province of Parthia, killing Andragoras, the governor of Parthia, and establishing themselves as the masters of northeastern

Iran. After their conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids, or the dynasty established by the Aparni leader Arshak/Arsaces, were called Parthians, or those who hail from Parthia.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; *Peoples:* Arsacids; Seleucids

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Bahmanjaneh

The name of an ancient Zoroastrian festival originally called Bahmanagan. In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, Vohu Manah (good purpose/good thought/good mind) is one of the Amsha Spentas, or holy immortals, of Zoroastrianism who was brought into existence by the great god Ahura Mazda to assist him with the creation of the world. Vohu Manah appears as Vahman in Middle Persian and Bahman in New Persian. Bahman is the name of the 11th month of the year as well as the second day of each month. In the Zoroastrian calendar, each day of the month had its own name. The second day of each month was called Bahman. Among Zoroastrians, days that had the same name as the month in which they fell were celebrated as festivals. One of these festivals was Bahmanagan, which corresponded with the second day (the day of Bahman or Bahman Ruz) of the month of Bahman.

Iranians continued to celebrate Bahamanagan after the fall of the Persian Sasanian dynasty and the arrival of Islam. The name of the festival, however, changed from Bahmanagan to Bahmanjaneh. Rich and poor, old and young, men and women, boys and girls participated in festivities by preparing sumptuous meals, singing, and dancing. According to the historian Gardizi, on the occasion of Bahmanjaneh the tradition among the Persians was to prepare a pot, called the "Pot of Bahmanjaneh," which included an assortment of vegetables, grains, seeds, and meats. Gardizi also reported that on the day of Bahmanjaneh, people ate Bahman Sorkh (Red Bahman) with milk, which was believed to bring them good fortune, improve memory, and counter the evil eye (Gardizi: 524–525). Mohammad Hossein ibn Khalaf Tabrizi, the 17th-century author of the Persian dictionary *Borhan-e Qate'* [Conclusive Proof], wrote that Iranians celebrated Bahmanjaneh on the second day of the month of Bahman by eating wild rue with milk, which was believed to bolster a person's memory (Tabrizi: 218). According to the Iranian scholar Zabihollah Safa, Bahmanagan was observed as a popular festival "down to the Mongol invasion in 1219" (Safa: Bahmanjana).

See also: *Religion:* Amesha Spentas; *Avesta;* Vohu Manah

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Chaharshanbeh Suri

Chaharshanbeh Suri (Feast of Wednesday or Red Wednesday) is a major celebration in the Iranian solar calendar. It takes place on the

last Wednesday of the Iranian calendar before the arrival of the Persian New Year, or Nowruz, which is celebrated on the first day of spring. Chaharshanbeh Suri is viewed as a festive prologue to the arrival of the vernal equinox. The highlight of the Chaharshanbeh Suri celebration begins after sunset, when men, women, and children from all walks of life jump over bundles of bushes and brushwood that have been set on fire. As they leap over the kindled bundles, the fire jumpers sing and welcome the pending arrival of the new year. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the new Islamic government denounced Chaharshanbeh Suri as a pagan ritual and banned fire jumping altogether, but the popular celebration refused to disappear and made an impressive comeback, with millions of fire jumpers participating every year in a national show of defiance.

Although Chaharshanbeh is the Persian word for Wednesday, there is no agreement on the exact meaning of the words *suri,* or *sur.* According to some scholars, *sur* means "feast." Other scholars, however, have maintained that *sur* derives from the word *sorkh* (red) or *sorkhi* (redness), referring in this context to the color of fire (Kasheff and Saʿidi Sirjani: Čahāršanba-Sūrī).

The historical origins of Chaharshanbeh Suri are shrouded in mystery. Writers of the Islamic era attribute the origins of the celebration to a variety of different individuals, sources, and traditions. Fire was believed to be sacred in pre-Islamic Iran. The Zoroastrian scripture, the *Avesta,* declares fire to be the son and creation of the great god Ahura Mazda (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Sirozah, 1.9). The custom of jumping over the fire, however, may have developed after the introduction of Islam in the seventh century CE. The practice of setting up and maintaining fires on higher ground was already prevalent in pre-Islamic Iran. According to the scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni, the Sasanian monarch Hormozd I (r. 270/272–273 CE) ordered fires to be built along hilltops and other elevations because he considered them a good omen and believed that they purified stagnant air (Biruni: 203, 32). Biruni also mentions that the ancient Iranians frequently fumigated their houses to repel the evil eye. The idea of a festive ritual centered on fire could also have been derived from Zoroastrian celebrations, including the Sadeh, a midwinter festival that includes the preparation of a bonfire as a means of defying the winter and the evil spirit as represented by the satanic Ahriman. As with Chaharshanbeh Suri, before the beginning of Sadeh festivities, members of the family participate in collecting and gathering wood, which is organized into bundles and set on fire after sunset. As the fire is lit, Zoroastrian priests, dressed in white to symbolize purity, recite verses from the *Avesta.*

In modern practice, the preparation for Chaharshanbeh Suri begins

a short time before the arrival of the last Wednesday of the year. Bushes and brushwood are either collected or purchased. Families who wish to jump over fire at home set up several bundles of the brushwood a short distance apart from one another in the yard. Those who prefer jumping over the fire in public or who lack sufficient space at home lay down several bundles of brushwood and/or bushes on a back street or even at times in a neighborhood intersection or gathering point. In rural areas and particularly in small villages, the ritual assumes a collective nature, with all members of the community jumping over the fire in a public and festive celebration. Shortly after the arrival of sunset the bundles are set on fire, and as the flames rise above the bundles, the members of the household or the residents of the neighborhood or village jump over the fire, singing "Sorkhi-ye Tow az Man, Zardi-ye Man az Tow" (translated as "Give me your beautiful red color and take back my sickly pallor.") In recent years firecrackers are also used, mostly by youths, to add a new element of noise and color to the festivities. In addition to jumping over the fire and singing, many families also burn rue seeds (*esfand*), which is believed to counter and destroy the evil eye. At times, as the rue seeds are thrown onto the fire, the matriarch of the household recites rhyming prayers, such as "Esfand, Esfand Duneh, Esfand Sad-o Si Duneh, Betarekeh Cheshmeh Hasud-o Bakhil-o Biguneh, Hamsaye-ye Dast Rast, Hamsaye-ye Dast Chap, Hamsayeh Bala Sar, Hamsa-ye Paeen-e Pa," which means "Rue, Rue Seeds, One Hundred Thirty Seeds, May the Evil Eyes of the Jealous Ones, the Greedy Ones, the Neighbor to the Right, the Neighbor to the Left, the Neighbor above Us, and the Neighbor below Us Be Blasted" (personal interview with author).

The last Wednesday of the year in the Iranian calender is celebrated as the Feast of Wednesday (Chaharshanbeh Suri). Bonfires are lit, and people jump over the flames. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

Many families conclude the Chaharshanbeh Suri celebrations with a specially prepared sumptuous meal shared by the entire family. A popular dish is fish with green vegetables and rice, and when fish is not available, a variety of different *polows,* or rice dishes, are served. Other popular items on the table include nuts and dried fruits, such as hazelnuts, pistachios, almonds, dried prunes, dried apricots, and raisins. During the time between Chaharshanbeh Suri and the arrival of the spring equinox, families welcome the arrival of spring by engaging in a very thorough process of housecleaning, called by some Persian-speaking communities in Iran and Afghanistan *khaneh takani* (literally “shaking the house”).

See also: *Cultures:* Nowruz; Sadeh

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Cuisine. *See* Iranian Cuisine

Education

Our knowledge about education in ancient Iran is limited to a few references made by Greek and Roman writers. Herodotus remarked approvingly that among the Iranians, before the "age of five a boy" lived "with the women and never sees his father, the object being to spare the father distress if the child" died "in early stages of its upbringing" (Herodotus: 1.136). The education of young boys was between "the ages of five and twenty," and they were taught "three things: … to ride, to use the bow, and to speak the truth" (Herodotus: 1.136). According to the Greek sources, the Iranians considered "telling lies more disgraceful than anything else, and, next to that, owing money" because they believed that an individual who owed money was bound also to be untruthful and tell lies (Herodotus: 1.138). Several centuries later, the Greek author Strabo wrote that the Persian nobility paid particular attention to the education of their children. Children were not brought into the presence of their parents, he wrote, until they were 4 years old. From the ages of 5 to 24, they were trained to use the bow and arrow, to hurl the javelin, to ride horses, and to always speak the truth. Boys had to undergo a rigid daily discipline, which began with teachers waking them up before dawn. Greek observers reported that Iranians believed in vigorous exercise to promote perspiration, physical conditioning, and health. Exercise and military training constituted an important component of one's education during the Arsacid (Parthian) period.

Our knowledge about the educational system during the Sasanian period is far more extensive. Sasanian kings acted as great patrons of arts and sciences. One of the major centers of learning in Sasanian

Iran was the city of Gondishapur, which emerged also as one of the most important centers for training and research in late antiquity. Located in Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan, Gondishapur was founded by the Persian Sasanian monarch Shapur I. During the reign of Shapur II, the city emerged as one of the most prosperous urban centers of the Sasanian Empire. Shapur built a medical center in the city, which included a major library. The Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan significantly expanded and strengthened the prestigious medical school at Gondishapur. During the reign of Khosrow I, a hospital was added to the medical complex. At this hospital, Greek, Indian, and Persian physicians attended to the needs of the sick. Meanwhile, the medical school offered courses in medicine, anatomy, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, and theology. Students and trainees were obliged to pass an examination before graduating from the school.

It was in this exciting and dynamic environment that the Persian scholar Borzuye joined government service and established a reputation for himself as an outstanding scholar and physician. As a physician, he treated his patients free of charge. It has also been written that the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I sent Borzuye, who was by then probably the most eminent physician at his court, to India to study the Indian sciences and healing techniques and recruit Indian physicians to teach at the medical school in Gondishapur. This offered a golden opportunity for Borzuye to study Indian medicine. India was viewed as a treasure house of ancient wisdom and knowledge and a destination for scholars, scientists, and writers from a variety of scientific fields.

It is not clear when Borzuye departed for India; how long he stayed in the country; which provinces, cities, and towns he visited; or when he returned to Persia. Borzuye returned from India with a large collection of scientific and literary books, which were translated into Middle Persian. Borzuye also brought back the game of chess and numerous herbal plants from his trip to India. Borzuye's visit to India left a profound impact on him. He studied the great works of Sanskrit literature and became engrossed with Indian mystical beliefs and practices. When he returned from India to Iran, he brought back several collections of fables, including the *Pañcatantra* (later in Persian *Kalila va Demna*), which he translated from Sanskrit to Middle Persian. *Kalila va Demna,* which had been originally translated as *Karirak ud Damanak,* was a collection of animal stories that originated in India almost 2,000 years ago. The two central protagonists, Kalila and Demna, were clever and shrewd jackals who related humorous and racy stories about birds, beasts, and humans. The common theme of the fables was astute leadership, wise conduct of power, and the value

of gaining genuine and faithful friendship. Neither the original Sanskrit nor Borzuye's translation have survived, but the eighth-century Persian writer Ibn al-Moqaffa' (721–757 CE), who was a convert from Zoroastrianism to Islam, translated the Middle Persian version of the book into Arabic. This translation, which has been praised as a masterpiece of Arabic literary prose, probably served as the basis for later Arabic and Persian translations. Today, numerous versions and translations of the stories Borzuye originally brought back from India are available in a variety of languages throughout the world.

Throughout his reign, Khosrow I exhibited a genuine interest in philosophical and religious issues. In 529 CE the Academy of Athens, "which had been the world's greatest center for philosophical inquiry for a thousand years," was shut down by the Byzantine emperor Justinian as part of his "imperial ban against pagan education" (Rosen: 236). Khosrow seized on this opportunity and recruited seven members of the academy's faculty "to re-create the academy at the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon, there to translate the works of Plato and his successors into Persian" (Rosen: 236). Though Byzantine historians such as Agathias expressed hostility and disdain for the Sasanian monarch and his philosophical sophistication, other sources praised Khosrow I for his wisdom and prudence. John of Ephesus wrote that Khosrow "was a prudent and wise man, and all his lifetime took pains to collect the religious books of all creeds, and read and studied them, that he might learn which were true and wise and which were foolish" (Rosen: 251). He also wrote that Khosrow "esteemed the Christian Bible above other books calling it true and wise above any other religion" (Rosen: 251).

Several Sasanian monarchs, including Khosrow I, have been credited for building bridges, roads, dams, and palaces. These construction projects required mathematicians, engineers, and architects. One of the most impressive accomplishments of Sasanian architecture was the magnificent royal palace at the city of Ctesiphon near Baghdad in present-day southern Iraq. The palace and its gigantic arch, known as Taq-e Kasra or the Archway of Khosrow, is a monument to the brilliance of Sasanian architects and engineers who designed one of the most impressive structures of the world during late antiquity. The archway was built with baked bricks and stands 93 feet (28.4 meters) high and 84 feet (25.5 meters) wide. Taq-e Kasra is the largest single-span vault of unreinforced brick in the world. The city of Ctesiphon was sacked by Arab Muslims, who looted and destroyed its magnificent buildings and palaces.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan; Shapur I; Shapur II

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Farsi. *See* Iranian Languages

Gardens. *See* Persian Gardens

Haft Sin. *See* Nowruz

Iranian Cuisine

Preparing, serving, and eating food was central to the social life of every urban, rural, and nomadic community in ancient Iran. Around this basic element of life revolved numerous rituals of socialization, leisure, and politics. Through their highly sophisticated dishes, the ancient Iranians introduced a new and rich culinary culture to the world.

Funeral stele depicts a Persian funeral feast, from Daskyleion in western Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), fifth century BCE. Iranian cuisine synthesized a wealth of cooking traditions. The ancestors of the Iranians who migrated from Central Asia encountered different culinary traditions and assimilated many of their features into their own cuisine. As they conquered and settled, they left a marked impact on the cuisine of the peoples and societies they conquered. Their own daily diet, in turn, was greatly influenced by the culinary traditions of the peoples they came to rule. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

Excavations at Median sites in western Iran indicate that for the early Iranian settlers cattle was the main meat source, followed by sheep, goats, and pigs. There were more sheep than goats, and though horse and cattle breeding constituted the main form of livelihood, hunting also provided an additional source of food. As Iranian dynasties ruling vast kingdoms built cities with increasingly magnificent palaces, gardens, and marketplaces, the preparation of food matured, and cuisine began to play a central role in the daily life of the rich and powerful. By the time the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE) rose to power, cooking the food of the king had become one of the most important responsibilities of the palace and the imperial kitchen.

The imperial kitchen served over 15,000 guests daily. Persian kings displayed their hospitality by organizing lavish banquets where guests sampled exotic meats, fruits, and vegetables. They also ate a variety of other dishes flavored with unique spices and served from elaborately designed plates and drinking vessels that gleamed with

brilliant gold and silver ornamentation. Some 1,000 animals were slaughtered every day for the king's kitchens, including horses, camels, oxen, asses, deer, and a variety of smaller animals as well as wild and domesticated birds, such as ostriches, geese, and chickens (Athenaeus: IV.145e). Of all these only small portions were served to the guests, each of whom could carry home whatever he had left untouched at the meal. Large portions of the royal meals were distributed among the bodyguards and "light-armed troopers" responsible for protecting the king and the royal family (Athenaeus: IV.145f). Preparing and serving food required cleanliness. All those who prepared the meals of the Persian kings had to observe the strict rules of hygiene, first bathing themselves and then serving the meals "in white clothes" (Athenaeus: IV.145b).

The king normally breakfasted and dined alone, although at times his mother, his queen, and some of his sons joined him (Athenaeus: IV.145d). The most distinguished and honored of the king's guests visited the palace for breakfast only and begged to be excused from other meals to host their own guests. Of those who were invited to dine with the king, some ate outdoors, while others dined inside the palace. No guest could eat in the king's presence. The king and his guests ate their meals in two separate rooms opposite each other. The king could see his guests through a curtain, but they could not see him (Athenaeus: IV.145b). On the occasion of public holidays, all dined with the king in a great hall. The audience hall of King Xerxes I in Persepolis could host 10,000 guests. The king also gave a royal banquet on the occasion of his birthday. This was "the one occasion in the year when the king" anointed "his head" and distributed gifts among his people (Herodotus: 9.110). At the royal dinners, no one was allowed to share the table of a Persian monarch except his mother and his wedded wife (Plutarch: 2.705). The mother sat above the king, and the wedded wife was placed below the king (Plutarch: 2.705). On exceptional occasions, the king displayed his generosity and largesse by inviting his brothers to join him at the table (Plutarch: 2.705). In the Parthian (Arsacid) court banquets, the king "occupied a couch on which he reclined alone; it was separated from the other couches and somewhat higher than they; his table was set before him apart, … and was laden with native dishes" (Athenaeus: IV.153b). Throughout the dinner, the king's concubines performed songs and played the lyre (Persian: *chang*), with one of them as the soloist and the others singing in chorus (Athenaeus: IV.145d). Persian monarchs had about a dozen companions with whom he drank in private. When the king's dinner was finished, his fellow drinkers were summoned by one of the court's attendants to join their royal master. The king reclined on a couch supported by feet of gold while his fellow drinkers gathered in front of

him on the floor (Athenaeus: IV.153c). The king's drinking companions could not drink the same wine that the king consumed. According to Athenaeus, Persian kings drank only "Chalybonian wine," the grapes for which were grown at Damascus in present-day Syria, where Persians "had introduced the culture of the vine" (Athenaeus: I.28.d). In public, the Persian kings could only get drunk on the day they sacrificed to the god Mithra. During this great festival, dedicated to the worship of Mithra, the king drank and danced to his heart's content (Athenaeus: X.434e). Since the palace served as a model for the entire empire, the dining practices and habits of the Persian king and his household had a profound impact on the cooking and feasting customs of the elite. Thus, at the banquets of the Persian viceroy of Babylonia 150 women played on harps and sang while he dined (Athenaeus: XII.530.d).

Outside the imperial palace, ancient Iranians celebrated life by gardening and by preparing sumptuous meals to serve to family, friends, and guests. Rich and poor used their birthdays to organize lavish banquets. According to Herodotus, of all days in the year a Persian most distinguished "his birthday" and celebrated it "with a dinner of special magnificence" (Herodotus: 1.133). The wealthy Persians baked whole "an ox or a horse or a camel or a donkey" in the oven and served it up at the table, while the poor cooked some smaller animal (Herodotus: 1.133). The main dishes at the meals were few, but the Persians had "many sorts of dessert, the various courses being served separately" (Herodotus: 1.133). Ancient Iranians had a special love for saffron. They planted saffron crocus in their gardens. The three stigmas inside the flower bulbs were plucked, dried, and used as natural dye, medicine, and seasoning in various dishes and delicacies. The Greeks and Romans, who feared the Persians and suspected their saffron "of being an aphrodisiac," warned their compatriots who dined with "this wily race to be wary, for saffron was stirred into their flavorful dishes for no other reason than to befuddle and weaken the brain" (Willard: 41).

See also: *Cultures:* Nowruz; Persian Gardens; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Media, Medes, and Median Empire

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Iranian Languages

Ancient Iranians were a branch of Indo-Iranians. Indo-Iranians were themselves members of the larger Indo-European–speaking family. The family of Indo-European languages consists of numerous branches, including Germanic, Slavic, Celtic, Hellenic, and Italic in Europe. Indo-European languages also include Indo-Iranian or Indo-Aryan languages in Asia. Thus, the ancient Iranian languages, including Avestan, the language of the Zoroastrian holy book, and Old Persian, the language of the Achaemenid kings, belong to the family of Indo-European languages. Today, the Iranian languages include Persian (Dari, Farsi, and Tajik), Kurdish (Kurmanji, Sorani, Zazaki, etc.), Luri, Taleshi, Yaghnabi, Baluchi, Pashto, and Ossetic, among others.

Sometime between 4500 and 2500 BCE, the Indo-Europeans, who descended from a common linguistic ancestor and lived on the vast Eurasian steppes, split into several branches, migrating from their original homeland and moving south to India, Central Asia, and the Iranian plateau as well as in a western direction to Europe. As Indo-European groups scattered in different directions and settled in various parts of Asia and Europe, they lost contact with one another, and their languages began to diversify and evolve into their modern forms. The ancient Iranians who settled in present-day Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and parts of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia gave their name to the country they had adopted as their new home, namely Iran (Land of the Aryans). Ancient Iranian languages were most closely related to Indian languages, particularly to Sanskrit. Modern Persian, which is called Tajik or Tajiki in Central Asia, Dari or Farsi in Afghanistan, and Farsi in Iran, is a descendant of Old Persian, the language of the Achaemenid royal house, and Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian dynasty. Aside from Middle Persian, which evolved from Old Persian, there were other Iranian languages spoken during the long reigns of the Arsacid (Parthian) and Sasanian Empires. These included Parthian, which was closely related to Middle Persian, as well as Bactrian, Chorasmian, Sogdian, and Old Ossetic (Scytho-Sarmatian). Parthian was spoken in the region east and southeast of the Caspian Sea. Bactrian was spoken in the region of Bactria (Old Persian: Bakhtrish), which lay between the Hindu Kush mountain

range to the south and the Oxus River (Amu Darya) to the north. The territory of the Bactrian plain correspond with present-day northern Afghanistan, incorporating the districts of Balkh, Tashkurgan, Kunduz, and Sar-e Pol. Chorasmian was the language of Chorasmia (Khwarazm), a region on the lower reaches of the Oxus south of the Aral Sea, corresponding with present-day northwestern Uzbekistan and northern Turkmenistan. Sogdian was the language of Sogdiana (Old Persian: Suguda), a region extending from the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in the south to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in the north, with its central region located in the Zarafshan and Kashka Darya River Valleys in present-day Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. The importance of Sogdiana is reflected in the mention of its name in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. Here, Sogdiana was described as the second of the good lands and countries, which the great god Ahura Mazda created. In later centuries, because of the central role played by Sogdian merchants in linking the economies of China and Central Asia to Iran, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, Sogdian colonies were widespread in urban centers along the major trade routes across Asia. It is therefore not surprising that a large number of Sogdian-language materials have been discovered in various cities, towns, and guard stations along the famed Silk Road. Modern Yaghnabi, spoken in the valley of the Yaghnab River in present-day Tajikistan, belongs to the Sogdian family of languages and dialects.

Family of Iranian Languages

Old Iranian Languages

Avestan
Median
Old Persian

Middle Iranian Languages (fourth century BCE–ninth century CE)

Parthian
Middle Persian
Eastern Middle Iranian Languages
Bactrian
Sogdian
Khwarazmian
Saka
Old Ossetic

Some Modern Iranian Languages

Baluchi
Gilaki

Kurdish (Kurmanji and Sorani)
Kurdish (Zazaki)
Luri
Ossetic
Persian (Dari, Farsi, Tajik)
Taleshi
Yaghnabi (Tajikistan)

Iranian languages are further divided into Eastern and Western Iranian languages. The term "Eastern Iranian languages" refers to those Iranian languages spoken in the northern, eastern, and northeastern regions of Greater Iran, but it does not mean that all languages spoken in the eastern or southeastern regions of present-day Iran belong to this language family. The Baluchi language, for example, is spoken in southeastern Iran, western Pakistan, and southwestern Afghanistan, but it is not an Eastern Iranian language. It belongs instead to the northwestern family of Iranian languages. Ossetian, which does belong to the Eastern Iranian language family, is spoken in the Caucasus region, much farther west than many Western Iranian languages are spoken. Indeed, today the regions where Eastern Iranian languages are spoken lay outside the boundaries of modern Iran and include China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Caucasus. Avestan, the language in which the the *Avesta* was written, belongs to the family of Eastern Iranian languages. Old Persian, the language of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, was a member of the family of Western Iranian and more accurately Southwestern Iranian languages. It is also believed that the Scythian languages spoken by the ancient Iranian nomadic groups who inhabited the Eurasian steppes belonged to the family of Eastern Iranian languages.

During the Parthian and later the Sasanian periods, the languages of both ruling dynasties, namely Parthian and Middle Persian, were Western Iranian languages, while such Iranian languages as Khotanese, Sogdian, Chorasmian, and Bactrian, to which one may add the remnants of such languages as Sarmatian and Alanic, belonged to the family of Eastern Iranian languages.

Today's modern Eastern Iranian languages are numerous and varied. Most of them are classified as North-Eastern, including Ossetian (spoken in the Caucasus region); Yaghnabi (which derives from a dialect closely related to Sogdian and is spoken in present-day Tajikistan); the Shughni group (Shughni, Roshani, Khufi, Bartangi, Roshorvi, and Sarikoli spoken in Tajikistan); Ishkashmi, Sanglichi, and Zebaki; Wakhi; Munji and Yidgha; and Pashto, which is one of the official languages of Afghanistan.

See also: *Cultures:* Middle Persian; Parthian

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Iranian Months

Iranians have their own calendar. The Iranian calender begins on the first day of spring. The Iranian months of the year derive their names from deities of ancient Iran. The names of the 12 months of the year in Persian are Farvardin (31 days), Ordibehesht (31 days), Khordad (31 days), Tir (31 days), Mordad (31 days), Shahrivar (31 days), Mehr (30 days), Aban (30 days), Azar (30 days), Day (30 days), Bahman (30 days), and Esfand (30 days). Six months in the Iranian calendar are named after the six Amesha Spentas, or the holy immortals of Zoroastrianism. These are Bahman, Ordibehesht, Shahrivar, Esfand, Khordad, and Mordad. According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy and bountiful immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Middle Persian: Ameshaspands), which represented the six attributes of the great god in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy entities into existence to assist him with the creation and protection of six holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and man. Ahura Mazda and Spenta Mainyu, together with the Amesha Spentas, constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or Heptad. Each of the Amesha Spentas represents an attribute of its creator, Ahura Mazda. As divine immortals who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for protecting an element of the world order. The 1st divine immortal is Vohu Manah (good purpose/good thought/good mind), which appears as Vahman in Middle Persian and Bahman in New Persian. Vohu

Manah is the protector of cattle. Bahman is the name of the 11th month of the year. The 2nd divine immortal is Asha Vahishta (best truth, best righteousness, best order), which appears as Ardvahisht in Middle Persian and Ordibehesht in New Persian. Asha Vahishta is the protector of fire. In the Iranian calendar, Ordibehesht is the name of the 2nd month of the year. The 3rd divine immortal is Khshathra Vairya (desirable dominion or power), which appears as Shahrevar in Middle Persian and Shahrivar in New Persian. Khshathra Vairya is the protector of the sky. The 4th divine immortal is Spenta Armaiti (holy or beneficent devotion), which appears as Spendarmad in Middle Persian and Esfand in New Persian. Spenta Armaiti is the protector of Earth. Esfand is the 12th month of the year in the Iranian calendar. The 5th divine immortal is Haurvatat (wholeness, health, protection), which appears as Hordad in Middle Persian and Khordad in New Persian. Haurvatat is the protector of water. In the Iranian calendar, Khordad is the name of the 3rd month of the year. The 6th divine immortal is Ameretat (immortality), which appears as Amurdad in Middle Persian and Amordad or Mordad in New Persian. Ameretat is the protector of plants. Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) himself is the special protector of man. The six holy immortals appear in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. Each of the holy immortals was venerated separately, and each had a month named for it and was celebrated with a festival of its own.

The remaining six months are named after important deities or lesser gods (*yazatas*) in Zoroastrianism. These are Tir (the fourth month of the year), which is named after the deity Tishtrya; Mehr (the seventh month of the year), named after Mithra, the deity of covenants and oaths as well as the sun god; Aban (the eighth month of the year), meaning "waters" and named for the ancient deity of waters, Aredvi Sura Anahita (Anahid); and Azar (the ninth month of the year), meaning "fire," which is venerated as the son and creation of the great god Ahura Mazda.

See also: *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Religion:* Adur; Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Languages. *See* Iranian Languages

Middle Persian

An Iranian language spoken between the third century BCE and the eighth century CE. Middle Persian developed out of Old Persian, the language used by the Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE). As with other Iranian languages, Middle Persian belonged to the Indo-European family of languages and was related to other Iranian languages, including Sogdian, Bactrian, Chorasmian, Parthian, etc. Middle Persian was the official language of the Sasanian dynasty, which ruled a vast and powerful empire from 224 to 651 CE. When the Sasanians imposed Zoroastrianism as the state religion of their empire, many Zoroastrian religious texts were transmitted to Middle Persian. Numerous other important Zoroastrian texts, including *Bundahishn* [Original Creation], *Dinkard* [Compendium], and *Arda Viraf* [Book of Viraf], were originally composed in Middle Persian. During the transition from Old Persian to Middle Persian, the grammar became considerably simplified, losing genders, cases, and many verbal forms. Old Persian had masculine, feminine, and neuter forms, while Middle Persian only had feminine and masculine forms. Also, Old Persian had singular, dual, and plural forms, while Middle Persian had only singular and plural forms. During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty, Middle Persian was written in a script adopted from Aramaic. The invasion of Iran by Muslim Arabs in the seventh century CE did not bring an end to the usage of Middle Persian. After the fall of the Sasanian Empire, Middle Persian continued to be used in various parts of Greater Iran, emerging gradually as the foundation of New Persian.

See also: *Cultures:* Iranian Languages; Parthian

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Months. *See* Iranian Months

Nowruz

The word "Nowruz" consists of two Persian words: *now* or *no,* which means "new," and *ruz,* which means "day." Literally meaning "New Day," Nowruz is usually translated as "New Year." Nowruz arrives at the vernal equinox on March 21, which signals the beginning of spring and a new year. March 21 corresponds with the first day of Farvardin, the first month in the Iranian solar calendar.

Though Zoroastrian in its origins, Nowruz is not a religious holiday. Thus, in Iran, Muslims, Jews, Armenians, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, etc., as well as agnostics and atheists celebrate this festive New Year. Neither is Nowruz confined to a particular ethnic or linguistic group. Hence, Iranian-speaking as well as Turkic-speaking people celebrate Nowruz with equal joy, passion, and gusto. The universal appeal of Nowruz made it attractive to various peoples who came into contact with Greater Iranian culture and civilization over the centuries. However, for today's Iranians, Afghans, Tajiks, and Kurds, Nowruz harkens back to their ancient cultural roots, linking them through a set of customs and rituals to their rich pre-Islamic past.

The arrival of Nowruz is celebrated through a variety of activities, which differ from one country to the next. Shopping for the items, which will be placed on the Haft Sin table, is popular among families from all social and economic backgrounds. Many families also shop for new clothes and shoes to discard the old clothes they wore during the dying year and dress in their new garments at the arrival of the new year.

Sometime in March before the arrival of the new year, lentil, wheat grass, or barley seeds are washed thoroughly and then set out to sprout into greenery on medium-sized plates. On the Wednesday immediately prior to the arrival of the new year shortly after sunset, bonfires are assembled and set alight, and men, women, and children jump over them singing "*sorkhi-ye tow az man, zardi-ye man az tow,*" which means "give me your beautiful red color and take back my sickly pallor." This celebration is called Chaharshanbeh Suri, or the Feast of Wednesday. The centrality of fire in the Chaharshanbeh Suri celebrations harkens back to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, which

viewed fire together with man, cattle, the sky, Earth, water, and plants as one of the seven creations of the great god Ahura Mazda.

In many parts of Iran and Afghanistan, families prepare for the arrival of the new year by a thorough cleaning of their homes, a tradition called *khaneh takani,* meaning "shaking the house." The cleaning of the house includes washing carpets, painting the house, and cleaning the yard and the attic. The cleaning has been interpreted as a Zoroastrian practice of fending off evil and preparing the house for the anticipated visit of the spirits of the ancestors. In other words, they are invited to descend on their previous homes to help nourish the growth of the *sabzeh,* the main source of their sustenance, which has been depleted during the long and cold days of winter.

A table called Haft Sin is also set with seven items, each with its name starting with the letter "S," hence Haft Sin, or Seven Ss. The seven items displayed on the traditional New Year table are *sabzeh* (wheat, barley, mung bean, or lentil sprouts that have grown on a plate), *senjed* (dried oleaster), *seer* (garlic), *seeb* (apple), *sekeh* (coins), *serkeh* (vinegar), and *samanu* (sweet pudding made from wheat germ). Certain items are usually added to the traditional Haft Sin table. These include a mirror; flowers, particularly hyacinths (*sonbol*); a bowl of water containing goldfish; painted eggs; milk; pomegranates; sweetmeats; confectioneries; candles; fruits; nuts; and sometimes a copy of the family's holy book, such as the Quran or the *Avesta,* and at times a copy of Ferdowsi's epic poem *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] or the *Divan of Hafez* by the beloved Persian poet of the 14th century.

Each item on the Haft Sin table is believed to stand for an aspect of rejuvenated life. There are, however, different interpretations of what each item symbolizes and represents. The colored eggs are believed to symbolize people, while the milk represents the cattle, the candles represent purifying fire, the coins represent wealth and prosperity, and the hyacinth represents immortality (Shahbazi: Haft Sin).

A few days before the arrival of the new year, a man with a blackened face, who is dressed in a bright red shirt and pants, appears singing on the streets of cities, towns, and villages across Iran. People of all ages and walks of life, but particularly the children, rush out of their homes to gather around and greet the smiling and singing man in red with cheers and laughter. The jovial singer and dancer is none other than Haji Firuz, the messenger who proclaims the arrival of the new year. Some pay the Haji Firuz, while others hand him sweets as a means of greeting him and demonstrating their appreciation. On some occasions families invite Haji Firuz to their homes, feeding him and paying him for an extra private performance. At times Haji Firuz appears as a lone performer, singing "Haji Firuzeh Sali Ye Ruzeh" ("It is Haji Firuz and it appears only once a year"). On other occasions,

Haji Firuz is accompanied by a small group of musicians whose faces are not blackened and who are dressed in regular clothes. A similar figure who is popularly called Baba-ye Dehqan (Father Farmer) also appears in various rural communities in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan heralding the arrival of the new year.

In celebrating the arrival of their New Year, Nowruz, which marks the first day of spring or equinox, the Iranian people organize a dining cloth on which is placed seven items, each beginning with the letter *sin* (S). (Creative Elixir/iStockPhoto.com)

If affordable for them, before the arrival of the new year all members of the family change into a set of new clothes. Some families send a younger child who is believed to bring good fortune out of the house with a tray, which holds coins and a bowl of water containing a fresh leaf. Upon the arrival of the new year, the bearer of good fortune who has been waiting outside of the house is called in to distribute coins among the members of his or her family and bless the house by going from room to room and sprinkling water from the bowl as an act of blessing the house. The entire family then gathers for a meal. In some regions of Iran that have close proximity to water, such as the Caspian provinces of northern Iran, a fish-vegetable-rice dish serves as the main dish. After the arrival of the new year, younger family members visit and pay their respect to their elders. Nowruz is not a New Year celebration centered on shopping for gifts. The exchange of gifts is limited to the older members of the family handing a memento of the occasion or a coin of some value to their children or grandchildren.

The historical origins of Nowruz are shrouded in mystery and

subjected to a great deal of scholarly speculation and debate. Though most probably an ancient Zoroastrian holiday, Nowruz was not mentioned in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. Nor are there any references to Nowruz in the inscriptions of the Achaemenid and Sasanian kings. Pahlavi texts mention the significance of the sixth day of the first month of the Iranian calendar or the day of Khordad in the month of Farvardin. The sixth day of each month in the Zoroastrian calendar is named after Haurvatat (i.e., Hordad or Khordad), meaning "wholeness," which is one of the Amesha Spentas (holy immortals) who had been brought into existence by the great god Ahura Mazda to assist him with creating the world and battling and overcoming evil. In a Pahlavi text titled *Mah-e Farvardin Ruz-e Khordad* [*The Month of Farvardin the Day of Khordad*], the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) asks the great god Ahura Mazda why people hold the day of Khordad (the sixth day) of the month of Farvardin (the first month of the calendar) as the greatest and the most auspicious of all days in the calendar (Kia: 7). In response, Ahura Mazda lists the great events that took place or will take place this day, beginning with the act of creation. Included in this long list are three deeds accomplished by the mythical king of the Pishdadian dynasty, Jamshid. The third of these is the building of ossuaries (*astodanha*) and commanding people to make them: "And when they [people] saw what Jam [Jamshid] had commanded them, they made the day 'New Day' and called it Nowruz" (Kia: 7–8; Boyce: Nowruz I). Thus, according to this particular text, Nowruz began not on the first day of the month of Farvardin but on its sixth day.

THE HAFT SIN TABLE

Seven items are displayed on the traditional Persian New Year table. All these items begin with the letter "S," hence Haft Sin (Seven Ss). These items are *sabzeh* (wheat, barley, mung beans, or lentil sprouts growing on a plate), *senjed* (dried oleaster), *seer* (garlic), *seeb* (apple), *sekeh* (coins), *serkeh* (vinegar), and *samanu* (sweet pudding made from wheat germ). Other items are added to the traditional Haft Sin table. These are flowers (particularly hyacinths), candles, coins, a large mirror, goldfish, painted eggs, pomegranates, hot milk, cookies, sweet meats, etc. At times families add on the table a copy of a holy book, such as the Quran or the *Avesta,* or the poetical works of a beloved Persian poet such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* or Hafez's *Divan* as well. The items on the table are generally considered decorative and ornamental rather than palatable and edible. Thus, the main meal served after the arrival of the new year is not served on the Haft Sin table.

Various texts of the Islamic era also attribute the establishment of Nowruz to Jamshid, the mythical king of Iran's legendary history. In

his book *Athar ul-Baqiyeh* [Vestiges of the Past], the Iranian scholar Biruni described several accounts of how Nowruz came into existence, all of them attributing its founding and commencement to Jamshid. For example, he reported that on Nowruz "it was the custom for people to present each other sugar," the reason being that "sugar-cane was first discovered during the reign of Jam [Jamshid] on the day of Nowruz" (Biruni: 200, 40). Biruni added that "the 6th of Farwardin [Farvardin, the first month in the Iranian calendar], the day of Khurdadh" [Khordad] was "the Great Nowruz for the Persians a feast of great importance. On this day—they say—God finished the creation," and on this day "God created Saturn" and the prophet Zoroaster "came to hold communion with God" (Biruni: 201, 39–40).

See also: *Cultures:* Chaharshanbeh Suri; *Legendary Kings:* Jamshid; Primary Documents: Document 39

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Old Persian

The language of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, which was founded by Cyrus II the Great and ruled from 550 to 330 BCE. Old Persian was one of the Western Iranian languages, which was spoken probably for centuries on the Iranian plateau before the establishment of the Achaemenid state. As with other Iranian languages, Old Persian belonged to the family of Indo-European languages. Middle Persian, which was the language of the Sasanian dynasty (224–651 CE), and New Persian are the direct offspring of the evolution of Old Persian. Our knowledge of Old Persian is based primarily on the cuneiform inscriptions of the Persian kings of the Achaemenid dynasty. The longest of these is the inscription of the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) at Bisotun near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. Old Persian was written from left to right and had 36 signs.

See also: *Cultures:* Iranian Languages; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; Xerxes I; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire

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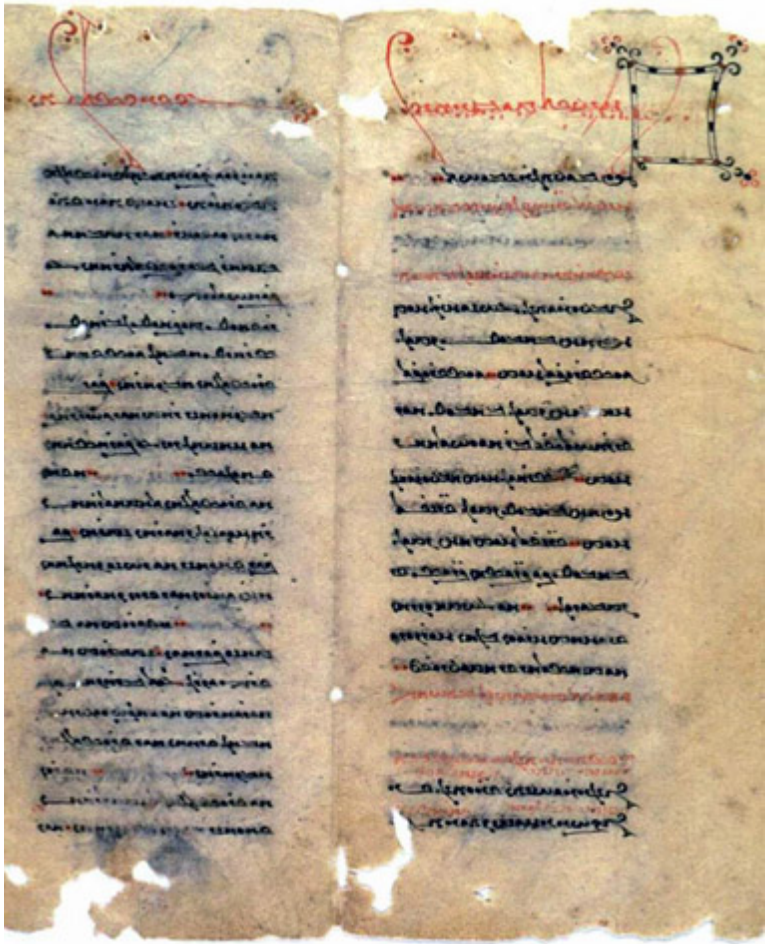
Pahlavi. *See* Middle Persian

Parthian

One of the Iranian languages spoken in pre-Islamic Iran. Parthian was the language of the province of Parthia, which is mentioned in the inscriptions of the Persian Achaemenid kings as Parthava. Ancient Parthia corresponded with the territory of present-day northeastern Iran and southern Turkmenistan. Parthian became the official language of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE). The Arsacids who hailed from Central Asia seized Parthia in 238 BCE. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians. Because documents and inscriptions from the Arsacid/Parthian period are very few, our knowledge of the Parthian language is insufficient. Parthian was written in a modified Aramaic script. Traces of Parthian have been found on rock inscriptions, coins, documents, and inscribed pottery fragments. Parthian coins and inscriptions as well as documents from different regions of the Arsacid Empire, particularly from Susa in present-day southwestern Iran, the ruins of Dura Europos on the right bank of the Euphrates in eastern Syria, and Nisa, the first capital of the Arsacid state in present-day southern Turkmenistan, provide early examples of the Parthian language.



Manichaean script in Parthian, one of the languages of ancient Iran. Parthian shared common linguistic roots with other Middle-Iranian languages, including Middle Persian, the language of the Persian Sasanian dynasty. Some Manichaean texts composed by the followers of the Iranian prophet Mani (216–276 CE) were written in Parthian. Manichaeans believed that their prophet's teachings constituted the completion of the doctrines of the great religious traditions of the past, especially Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. (Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images)

One of the earliest records of the Parthian language have been found on the ostraca (inscribed pottery fragments), recording for the most part wine deliveries at Nisa. The Iranian prophet Mani (216–276 CE) and his followers also used Parthian in some of their religious writings. These include the hymn cycles of Mar Ammo, a third-century disciple of Mani who established the Parthian language as the official language of the eastern Manichean Church. Our knowledge of Parthian has also been greatly enhanced by the discovery of Manichaean religious manuscripts in Central Asia, particularly in the

Turfan (Turpan) region of present-day northwestern China. After the destruction of the Arsacid/Parthian Empire at the hands of Ardashir I in 224 CE, the first kings of the newly established Sasanian dynasty used Parthian in their inscriptions. For example, the inscription of the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, on the walls of the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster), a cubic-shaped towerlike structure situated at Naqsh-e Rostam in the province of Fars in southern Iran, was written in three languages: Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek. These Sasanian inscriptions have allowed linguists to develop a better understanding of the structure and grammar of Parthian.

See also: *Cultures:* Iranian Languages; Middle Persian; Primary Documents: Document 21

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Persian Gardens

The ancient Persians were the master gardeners of antiquity. The kings of the Achaemenid dynasty displayed a genuine affection and support for the art, science, and technique of plant cultivation. Persian kings and their provincial governors promoted farming as "among the noblest and most essential concerns," introducing varieties of plants throughout their vast empire (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.4). Whenever a Persian king bestowed gifts, he first summoned those who had "proved themselves brave in war" and, second, rewarded those who had cultivated "their lands best" and made them "productive" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.4). Cyrus, "who was without any doubt the most illustrious of all the Persian kings, once told those who had been summoned to receive rewards that he himself had the right to receive the rewards in both categories: for, he said he was best at cultivating land and at defending the land he had cultivated" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.4). The archaeological excavations at Pasargadae, Persepolis, Susa, and Babylon have unearthed large, complex, and beautifully designed gardens, parks, and irrigation canals.

The Persian Achaemenid kings took a special pride in designing their own large gardens and parks, which were watered by rivers or "an aqueduct—the earliest known record of gravity-fed water rills and basins arranged in a geometric system" (Hobhouse: 8). Far from being a space created by a hedonistic, self-indulgent, and despotic monarch to satisfy his sensual pleasures, the gardens provided shade and protection from wind and the harsh heat of the sun, allowing Persian monarchs and administrators to work daily on collecting and planting flowers and trees, especially those that bore fruit. Animals, especially those they had encountered in their military campaigns, were also gathered, brought, and housed within the confines of these large parks, allowing the outer space of each to be utilized as a hunting ground.

The planning of gardens and parks was incorporated into the architectural designs of palaces, mansions, and tombs. The Greek historian Arrian wrote that the tomb of Cyrus II the Great, founder of the Persian Achaemenid empire, was in "the royal park in Pasargadae; a grove of various sorts of trees had been planted round it; there were streams of running water and a meadow with lush grass" (Arrian: 6.29). Protection from the wind and the sun were essential elements of the buildings and their gardens. Architectural excavations "have revealed the orientation of two other open-sided pavilions from which to view the garden during the heat of the day" (Hobhouse: 11). Beginning in the second century CE, the Parthians introduced the barrel-vaulted half-spheres called *ayvans* or *ivans,* whose "recessed spaces and high ceilings" created "a cool refuge" (Hobhouse: 11). Building on this Parthian innovation, the Sasanians developed "towering *ayvans,* backed by deep halls," that "provided shady retreats overlooking substantial pools and ornamental garden layouts, often with a hunting park beyond" (Hobhouse: 11).

Reconstruction of Persepolis and its gardens. The Persians were the master gardeners of antiquity. Persian monarchs designed their own parks, and they transplanted flowers and plants from across their vast empire to supplement and enrich their gardens. (De Agostini Picture Library/De Agostini/Getty Images)

There are numerous references in Greek sources to Persian kings, princes, and provincial governors not only maintaining gardens and parks but also working on them as gardeners. In his *Oeconomicus,* the Greek author Xenophon wrote that in whichever of his territories the Persian king lived and whichever he visited, he was "concerned that there should be gardens—the *paradeisoi*" as they were called—"full of all the fine and beautiful plants that the earth naturally" produced, and he spent "most of his time in these, except when the time of year prevents it" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.13). The Spartan admiral Lysander, who had joined Cyrus the Younger as a mercenary, was astonished when the Persian prince told him that he had measured and arranged everything in his garden in Sardis in western Asia Minor and had "planted some of the trees himself" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.20–25). Cyrus added that whenever he was not participating in a military campaign he never dined "before working up a sweat either by practicing some military skill or doing some agricultural work or, at times, engaging in some competitive activity" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.20–25). In his description of the campaign of Cyrus the Younger against his brother Artaxerxes II, Xenophon wrote that the Persian prince "had a palace and a large *paradeisos* full of wild animals" in the city of Celaenae in Phrygia (west-central Asia Minor), "which he used to hunt on horseback whenever he wanted exercise for himself and his horses" (Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition:* 2.8). In his

biographical essay on the Achaemenid monarch Artaxerxes II, the Greek historian Plutarch wrote about one of the royal mansions, "which had beautiful ornamented parks in the midst of a region naked and without trees" (Plutarch: 2.721). In his analysis of the Babylonian texts of the Achaemenid period, Muhammad Dandamayev concluded "from the texts under consideration that in Babylonia there were at least three 'paradises' belonging to the Achaemenid kings, which were situated in the neighborhood of Sippar, Uruk, and Nippur" (Dandamayev: 117). Given their love for gardening, it is not surprising that the ancient Persians were fascinated and involved with the design and construction of canals and irrigation systems.

Imitating the members of the royal family, each Persian governor (satrap) had a palace, which had its own large garden (*firdu*). In these large gardens or parks, the satraps grew trees and plants. To ensure the richness and diversity of their gardens and parks, Persian officials transplanted trees and plants from one province of the empire to another. Through Greek sources, we learn that at least one Persian satrap transplanted trees and plants from Syria to Sardis in western Asia Minor.

The word for a walled garden or a pleasure park in Old Persian, *paridaida,* was converted into Greek as *paradeisos* and into Latin as *paradisus.* Subsequently the Latin version was adopted in French as *paradis* and in English as "paradise" (Fakour: 1; Yamauchi: 332). The word was also introduced into the languages of the ancient Near East. "In Akkadian it appears as *pardesu,* and in Hebrew as *pardes.* The Greek (i.e., Hellenistic) version of the Old Testament dating from the 3rd century BCE used the word *paradeisos* for the garden of Eden [Gen. 3:8–10]" (Yamauchi: 333). The Arabic word for "paradise" in the Quran, the Muslim holy book, is *ferdaws* (Quran: 18.107, 23.11), which also originates from Old Persian.

See also: *Primary Documents:* Document 19

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Sadeh

Sadeh is an ancient celebration that symbolizes Iran's rich cultural heritage. It is a feast of the creation of fire, a midwinter festival that has been observed among Iranians since ancient times. Fire plays a central role in Zoroastrian beliefs and ceremonies. According to the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy scripture, Fire was the son of the great god Ahura Mazda, his holiest creation and a symbol of the religion. Prayer is often performed in front of a fire, and consecrated fires are kept perpetually burning in major temples.

Jashn means "festival," and Sadeh means "hundred." Jashn-e Sadeh therefore means the "Festival of 100" and offers the opportunity to the faithful to express their gratitude for the invention of fire. During the Sadeh festivities, ancient Iranians honored fire and celebrated the anticipated end of winter and its long, dark nights. Today, the Zoroastrians in Iran gather after sunset to mark Sadeh—an ancient midwinter feast dating to Iran's pre-Islamic past that is also drawing new interest from Muslim Iranians. Zoroastrian priests, dressed in white to symbolize purity, recite verses from the *Avesta* before the community of the faithful. Men and women in traditional dress carry torches and set a huge bonfire as young people dance. Although the feast of fire has traditionally been marked by Zoroastrians, many Muslim Iranians have begun to join the festival.

See also: *Religion:* Adur; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas

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Saffron

Saffron became greatly prized as both a plant and a spice among the kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE) and went on to become one of the most sought-after spices throughout the ancient world. Official documents of the Iranian court and the robes of the emperors were frequently dyed with saffron. Wall carvings and sculptures at their ancient palace of Persepolis depict garments of indigo and saffron coloring. In his play *Persians,* the Greek playwright Aeschylus alluded to the use of saffron dye when he described King Darius's footgear: "Shah, great Shah, Lord King of past times, come, draw near, appear! Appear on the peak of your burial mound! Raise your saffron-tinted slipper! Show the perfume of your kingly tiara! Ever benevolent Dareios [Darius], appear" (Aeschylus: 153–154). Second only to purple, the yellow derived from the saffron crocus was the most common color used to clothe the elite units of the Iranian army. The Achaemenid army units, including the 10,000 Immortals, the elite unit within the imperial army, also wore saffron-colored hoods.

Saffron was greatly prized among the ancient Iranians. Official documents and the robes of the members of the Persian royalty were dyed with saffron. The three stigmas inside the flower bulbs were plucked, dried, and used as natural dye, medicine, and seasoning in various dishes. (Michael Peuckert/Eye Ubiquitous/Corbis)

Aside from using it in dyeing garments, ancient Iranians used saffron in weaving their rugs. Although rugs from the Achaemenid period have not survived, the literature of the time offers strong evidence of their existence and popular use. In describing the arrival of a certain Pharnabazus, the Greek writer Xenophon wrote that he "arrived wearing clothing that was worth a great deal of gold, and as his servants placed embroidered carpets beneath him, on which the Persians, with their soft style of living, are accustomed to sit" (Xenophon: *Helenika,* 4.1.29–30).

Central to daily life in ancient Iran were the private gardens, or *pairidaeza,* watered by aqueducts. The ancient Persians were the master gardeners of antiquity. The kings of the Achaemenid dynasty

displayed a genuine affection and support for the art, science, and technique of plant cultivation. Persian kings and their provincial governors promoted farming as "among the noblest and most essential concerns," introducing varieties of plants throughout their empire (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.4). Whenever a Persian king bestowed gifts, he first summoned those who had "proved themselves brave in war," and then he rewarded those who cultivated "their lands best and make them productive" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.4). Cyrus, "who was without any doubt the most illustrious of all the Persian kings, once told those who had been summoned to receive rewards that he himself had the right to receive the rewards in both categories: for, he said he was best at cultivating land and at defending the land he had cultivated" (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* IV.4). The archaeological excavations at the tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae and at the Achaemenid capitals in Persepolis, Susa, and Babylon have unearthed large, complex, and beautifully designed gardens, parks, and irrigation canals. The Persian Achaemenid kings took a special pride in designing their own large gardens and parks, which were watered by rivers or "an aqueduct—the earliest known record of gravity-fed water rills and basins arranged in a geometric system" (Hobhouse: 8). It was in these enclosed gardens or paradises that ancient Iranians celebrated life by gardening and preparing sumptuous meals to serve to family, friends, and guests. They also planted saffron crocus in their gardens. The three stigmas inside the flower bulbs were plucked, dried, and used as natural dye, medicine, and seasoning in various dishes and delicacies. Through their highly sophisticated dishes, the ancient Iranians introduced a new culinary culture. The Greeks and Romans, who feared the Iranians and suspected their saffron of "being an aphrodisiac," warned their compatriots who dined with "this wily race to be wary, for saffron was stirred into their flavorful dishes for no other reason than to befuddle and weaken the brain" (Willard: 41).

Under Arsacid (Parthian) rule (247/238 BCE–224 CE), the famed Silk Road connected China to Central Asia, Iran, and Rome, allowing Iranian plants, spices, foodstuffs, medicine, and musical instruments to travel eastward. Saffron from India and Greater Iran was introduced to China by way of the Silk Road. The Chinese used saffron to flavor wines as well as to perfume their clothes and hair. To the west, the Parthians established a close trading relationship with Rome. Among Parthian exports to Rome were textiles, spices, and a variety of lotions and creams, including an ointment called "royal," used by the Parthian kings. This ointment, which was derived from several plants and spices including saffron, was very popular among Rome's rich and powerful families.

The Parthians were overthrown by the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–

651 CE), which imposed Zoroastrianism as the state religion of its empire. The fragments of Zoroastrian literature that have survived reveal a culture fascinated with nature and plants. The Zoroastrian text *Bundahishn* includes extensive writings on plants, which is characteristic of other Persian texts of the era. *Bundahishn* lists extensive categories of plants, including trees and shrubs, fruit trees, corn, flowers, aromatic herbs, salads, spices, grass, wild plants, medicinal plants, gum plants, and all plants used to produce oil, dyes, and clothing. Saffron, along with other plants that could be used for dyeing clothes, was included as a distinct category called dye-plants. The ancient Chinese attributed the origins of saffron to Kashmir and Sasanian Iran. The role of ancient Iranians in popularizing the use of saffron is revealed by examining the Tibetan word for saffron: *kur-kum, gur-kum,* or *gur-gum,* which is traceable to the Persian word *kurkum* or *karkam.* Experts believe that "the Tibetans carried the word to Mongolia, and it is still heard among the Kalmuk on the Volga" (Laufer: 320).

Aside from its culinary and medicinal usage, saffron was utilized in dyeing Persian carpets and rugs. Pre-Islamic Iran "reached a high level of achievement in textiles and although specimens of the works of Sasanian weavers have … rarely survived, the details of costume in the great rock-cut reliefs of the kings of the third to the seventh centuries CE show their mastery of pattern" (Robinson: 16). The Sasanian monarch Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE) established a successful weaving industry in various urban centers of his empire, including Susa in southwestern Iran. The dye from saffron was undoubtedly used to provide coloring for these Iranian handicrafts, the precursors of today's world-renowned Persian carpets.

See also: *Cultures:* Persian Gardens

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Sports

Sports were enormously popular among ancient Iranians, who were fond of a variety of games and athletic competitions. As they migrated from the steppes of Central Asia, these Iranians brought their ancient sporting traditions to the Near East. Public contests were held in the presence of the king, who handed prizes and medals to the winners in pentathlon competitions, which included jumping, discus throwing, running, wrestling, javelin throwing, and at times boxing (Strabo: 7.179). The winners were adorned with gold (Strabo: 7.179). Hunting was also very popular not only as a sport activity but also as a means of training young men for war. Ancient Iranians were superb riders, archers, and javelin throwers. While riding on his horse, the hunter threw spears, bows, javelin, and slings (Strabo: 7.179). Hunting and wrestling numbered among the most favorite pastimes. In addition to learning how to read and write and studying various sciences, the members of the royal family, the pages of the palace, and the children of the Persian nobility received physical training and gained skills in horseback riding, weightlifting, wrestling, archery, sword training, and javelin throwing. It is not surprising therefore that throughout their long and rich history, Iranians have been known for their extraordinary achievements in various athletic fields.

Athletic and sport activities were an integral part of daily life in ancient Persia. The Persian Achaemenid prince Cyrus the Younger told a surprised Spartan commander, Lysander, that whenever he was in good health he never dined before working up a sweat either by practicing some military skill or doing some gardening (Xenophon: *Oeconomicus,* 4.24). One of the most popular sports among ancient

Persians was polo, a game of Central Asian origin, that was first played in ancient Iran as a form of training the Persian cavalry units. The game took the form of a miniature battle, and both men and women of the Persian nobility participated in it. During the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz), the queen and her attendants played polo against the king and his officials. Polo spread from Iran to India, Central Asia, and China and as far east as Japan.

The Parthian armies were greatly feared by the Romans. They relied heavily on lightly armed cavalrymen equipped with bows and arrows and special cavalry units that were both heavily armed and heavily armored so that both horse and rider were protected by coats of chain mail. (Private Collection/Ancient Art and Architecture Collection Ltd./Bridgeman Images)

Besides polo, archery was also a very popular sport in ancient Persia. The ancient Iranians were master archers from the time they emerged as a distinct people in Central Asia. While the sword was used in the close-range battle, the bow and arrow remained the

standard long-range weapon. In the legendary history of Iran, the greatest heroes and warriors were also master archers. No archer in the Iranian culture can match the greatness and popularity of Arash. The story goes that King Manuchehr of Iran is engaged in a fierce battle against Iran's sworn enemy, the Turanian king Afrasiyab. Afrasiyab, who is on the verge of defeating the Iranians, proposes to end the war and conclude a peace treaty if the Iranians agree that the boundary between Iran and Turan be established by an archer who would shoot his arrow in an easterly direction from the top of a mountain. Wherever the arrow lands would be recognized as the boundary between the two kingdoms. Afrasiyab's expectation is that his kingdom of Turan will seize much of the territory of Iran, since no archer can shoot his arrow beyond a short distance. The brilliant archer Arash volunteers to discharge his arrow as far east as he can. Arash climbs Mount Damavand in the Alborz mountain range and discharges his arrow. Arash's arrow travels long and far before it lands at the end of the day on the banks of the Oxus River. Upon releasing his arrow, Arash's body disintegrates. Arash is viewed as a great champion and a true hero of Iran for saving the country from falling into hands of its enemies. Two other great archers in the legendary history of Iran are Rostam and Esfandiyar, who appear as the two greatest heroes in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]. During the long reign of the Arsacid dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE), members of the Arsacid (Parthian) nobility attacked the enemy with long spears, lances, and pikes or from a distance by shooting extremely swift arrows with their strong bows. To the shock of their enemies, the barbed arrowheads pierced through hard and soft armor, inflicting severe damage on veins and muscles. The Parthian cavalry was known for the unique and exceptional ability of its horsemen to shoot arrows as they fled, an old and extremely difficult technique known as the "Parthian shot." Archery remained a passion of Iranian kings down to the 19th century. Polo and archery went hand in hand with other war-related games, such as horseback riding, hunting, swordplay, fencing, spear throwing, putting the stone or throwing the boulder, and the game of wielding a mace (*gorz*), a heavy spiked club whose handling required strong arms. Spear throwing was such a prominent skill that the Persian Achaemenid kings had their own spear-bearers. Thus, before seizing the throne of the Persian Empire, the Achaemenid monarch Darius I served as the spear-bearer of Cambyses II. When Darius became king, he gave his close friend and confidant Gobryas the title *arshtibara* (spear-bearer) as reflected in his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran near Persepolis (Briant: 108). All the above-mentioned sports and activities were directly connected to military training and battlefield performance.

Another popular game was wrestling, which dates back to ancient Iran and particularly the long reign of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire. This sport continued after the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the introduction of Islam. *Zur khanehs* (houses of strength) served as traditional Iranian gymnasiums. Here athletes, who exercised to build a strong body, also learned the philosophical and spiritual principles of Persian mysticism, such as purity of heart, selflessness, compassion, humility, and respect toward fellow human beings. They were also taught that abstinence from sexual intercourse and bodily indulgence preserved their physical strength and emotional balance. The wrestler who emerged from this long and arduous training was called a *pahlavan* (hero warrior). The word *pahlavan* derives from "Parthian," and we come across this term when reading about the Parthian dignitaries of ancient Iran. The great Parthian commander who inflicted a crushing defeat on the Romans at Carrhae in 53 BCE was Surena or Suren Pahlav. A true *pahlavan* was not only a man of muscles and physical strength but also a spiritual being with unique and distinct personal and ethical qualities. These included grace and humility, particularly when he defeated a challenger. Today in Iran, this traditional system of training an athlete is referred to as Varzesh-e Pahlavani (Heroic Sport) or Varzash-e Bastani (Ancient Sport). The traditional training combines physical exercises and strength training, which are performed while the epic poetry of Ferdowsi as composed in his *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] is recited.

See also: *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Kings and Queens of the Achaemenid Dynasty

OVERVIEW ESSAY

The Persian Achaemenid dynasty ruled a vast and powerful empire from 550 to 330 BCE. Originally based in the kingdom of Anshan in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars, the small Persian state was, according to the Greek historian Herodotus, a tributary of the much larger and far more powerful kingdom of Media. During the reign of Cyrus II, Anshan revolted against the authority of the last Median king, who appears as Astyages in Herodotus's *Histories*. Once Cyrus had defeated the Medes, he marched against their capital, Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) and seized it, together with its royal treasury. Having unified Media and Persia under his rule, Cyrus began to expand his territory westward, first defeating King Croesus of Sardis in 547 BCE. With the fall of Sardis, the Persians became the masters of Asia Minor. After the conquest of Asia Minor, Cyrus expanded the territory of his fledgling kingdom eastward, seizing the southern regions of Central Asia. Next came the turn of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which was defeated and seized by the armies of Cyrus in 539 BCE. By the time he was killed in a battle against the Scythians of Central Asia, Cyrus had laid the foundation of a powerful empire that would last for two centuries after his passing.

The Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great continued to expand territorially during the reign of his son and successor, Cambyses II, who invaded and occupied Egypt in 525 BCE. After the death of Cambyses, the empire fell into chaos when a man claiming to be Bardiya, Cambyses's younger brother, revolted and assumed the reins of power. However, the pretender was overthrown and killed by seven Persian officers who installed one of their own as the new king. This new monarch was known as Darius I. When Darius ascended the Persian throne, revolts erupted across the empire, forcing the new monarch to send his armies to suppress them. Once he had suppressed these rebellions, Darius continued with the expansionist policies of

Cyrus the Great and Cambyses II. In the west, the Persian armies seized Thrace and Macedonia. They also attacked the Scythians north of the Black Sea. In the east the boundaries of the Persian state reached as far as the Indus River Valley. An ambitious builder, Darius built the King's Road as well as the Suez Canal, linking the four corners of his vast empire. Toward the end of his reign Persian armies became involved in military operations in Greece, where they were defeated.

Darius I died before he could organize a major military campaign against the Greek city-states. His death brought one of his sons, Xerxes, to power. Xerxes's reign has been identified by some historians as the beginning of a long period of decline in Persian power and dominance. The identification of Xerxes's reign with the beginning of decline is mostly based on the Greco-centric view that Persian armies suffered defeats on land and sea at the hands of Greek city-states. Upon closer examination, however, this approach seems overly simplistic, because even after military setbacks in Greece, the Persian armies and administration remained intact, and the empire continued to function for another 130 years.

The reigns of Xerxes's successors, particularly those of Darius II and Artaxerxes II, witnessed the slow decline of Persian authority at least in Egypt and western Asia Minor. During the reign of Artaxerxes III, however, the Persian Empire underwent a period of political and military resurgence. Persian authority was restored in western Asia Minor when the revolt of the Persian satraps (governors) was suppressed. After several initial setbacks, the Persian armies also seized Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon) as the first step toward the invasion of Egypt, which was reincorporated into the Persian state in 343 BCE. Ironically and tragically, at the very moment when the Persian state was experiencing a true comeback, the Achaemenid dynasty received a fatal blow.

Bagoas, a commander and confidant of Artaxerxes III, staged a palace coup against his royal master, killing the Persian monarch and all his sons except Arses, who was kept alive so he could play the role of the puppet king. While Arses ascended the throne, Bagoas acted as the power behind it. Arses soon discovered the truth about Bagoas's role in murdering his father and brothers. Before Arses could remove him, however, Bagoas killed the young Persian king and his son. With these killings, the Achaemenid dynasty came to an abrupt end in 336 BCE, a scant two years before the invasion of Asia Minor by Alexander of Macedon. The last prince to enjoy a distant link with the Achaemenid royal line was Ochus, who was installed on the throne as Darius III. The new king managed to remove the usurper Bagoas from power but failed to prepare the empire he had inherited for a war

against the Macedonian invaders. After suffering two humiliating defeats at the hands of Alexander, the ill-fated Darius III was murdered by his own generals in 330 BCE.

Achaemenes

According to the inscription of the Persian monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) at Bisotun in western Iran, Achaemenes (Old Persian: Hakhamanish) was the founder of the Persian Achaemenid royal house. The Bisotun inscription identifies Achaemenes as the father of Teispes (Old Persian: Chispish), Teispes as the father of Ariaramnes (Old Persian: Ariyaramna), Ariyaramnes as the father of Arsames (Old Persian: Arshama), and Arsames as the father of Hystaspes (Old Persian: Vishtaspa), who was the father of Darius I. Three other inscriptions in Morghab in the southern Iranian province of Fars proclaim Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire, as an Achaemenian or a direct descendant of Achaemenes. In his cylinder unearthed in Babylon, however, Cyrus the Great did not mention Achaemenes as his ancestor. He stated that his father was Cambyses (Kambujiya), his grandfather was Cyrus (Kurush), and his great-grandfather was Teispes (Chishpish). Some scholars have therefore maintained that the inscriptions at Morghab were incised during the reign of Darius I, who was trying to legitimize his seizure of power through a military coup by creating a common ancestry and lineage for his family and that of Cyrus the Great, thus attempting to make himself a close relative of Cyrus.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; Darius I; Teispes

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Arsames

Arsames (Old Persian: Arshama) was the name of several important members of the Achaemenid royal house, the most important being the grandfather of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE). In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, Darius I identified Hystaspes (Old Persian:

Vishtaspa) as his father, Arsames (Old Persian: Arshama) as his grandfather, Ariaramnes (Old Persian: Ariyaramna) as his great-grandfather, Teispes (Old Persian: Chishpish) as his great-great-grandfather, and Achaemenes (Old Persian: Hakhamanish) as the founder of the royal house (Kent: 116, 119). Darius also claimed that there were eight kings in his family line before he ascended the throne, which suggests that Arshama may have been a local king or at least a governor, most probably somewhere in the province of Parsa (Persis) in present-day southern Iran. This possibility cannot, however, be validated by existing available sources. When Darius I seized the throne in 522 BCE, both his father, Vishtaspa, and his grandfather, Arshama, were alive.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire

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Arses

A king of the Persian Achaemenid Empire who ruled from 338 to 336 BCE. Arses was the son of the Persian monarch Artaxerxes III, who ruled from 359 to 338 BCE. Arses came to power after his father, Artaxerxes III, was murdered together with most of his family by Bagoas, a close confidant of the king who had performed ably and skilfully in the Persian reconquest of Egypt. Bagoas was not only an intelligent and capable commander but also a ruthless and ambitious individual who dreamed of ruling the Achaemenid Empire. After killing Artaxerxes III, Bagoas kept Arses alive so that he could use him as a puppet king. Arses, however, discovered the truth about the role of Bagoas in the murder of his father and brothers and tried to remove the ruthless courtier, but Bagoas murdered Arses and his sons as well. Thus, the Achaemenid royal house was destroyed several years before the invasion of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great. In a desperate search for a legitimate heir to the throne who could claim a direct link to the Achaemenid male line, the Persian governor of Armenia, Artashata (Ochos), was chosen as the new king. Artashata ascended the Persian throne as Darius III. When Darius III tried to wrest the reins of power from the ambitious courtier, Bagoas tried to

poison the king, but Darius was informed of the plot. The king forced the conspirator to drink the poisoned cup himself and end his own life.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes III; Darius II; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great)

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Artaxerxes I

The king of the Persian Achaemenid state who ruled from 465 to 424 BCE. Artaxerxes I (Old Persian: Artakhshacha I) was the second son of King Xerxes I and the grandson of Darius I. Artaxerxes's mother was Amestris, the daughter of the Persian commander Otanes who had supported Darius I when he seized the throne after the death of Cambyses, the son of Cyrus the Great, in 522 BCE. The Greek sources gave Artaxerxes the surname of Macrocheir, while his surname in Latin was Longimanus (Longhand), because his right hand was apparently longer than his left. Classical sources generally described the Persian king as a brave, kind, benevolent, and handsome man.

As the second son of his father, Artaxerxes was not in the main line of succession. The heir apparent was Darius, the oldest son of Xerxes I. Artaxerxes was installed on the Persian throne by Artabanus, the captain of the royal guard who murdered Xerxes, the father of the new monarch. Instead of admitting to his crime, Artabanus accused Darius, the oldest son of Xerxes, of patricide, convincing Artaxerxes to order the execution of his brother. The ultimate objective of Artabanus was to eventually remove Artaxerxes and seize the throne for himself. Before he could carry out his plot, however, Artaxerxes moved against him and killed Artabanus in hand-to-hand combat (*Diodorus Siculus:* XI.69.6).

Artaxerxes I, the Persian Achaemenid monarch, was praised for his kindness and compassion. He followed the tolerant policies of Cyrus the Great and Darius I, and lent his support to the Jewish leaders who were trying to resettle their community in Palestine. (Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

The reign of Artaxerxes began with the rebellion of the king's brother, who served as the governor of Bactria (present-day northern Afghanistan). This rebellion was quickly suppressed. In 460 BCE, a more significant rebellion broke out in Egypt. Inaros, a Libyan who had requested assistance from Athens, led the insurrection. The Athenians agreed to support him and sent 200 ships to Egypt. The confrontation between the rebels, backed by the Athenians, and the Persians, supported by pro-Persian Egyptians, was centered on Memphis, south of modern-day Cairo, the capital of Egypt. During a battle between the rebels and the Persian army at Papremis in the western Nile River delta, Achaemenes, the brother of Artaxerxes I, was killed, but the Athenians failed to capture Memphis. Artaxerxes I

dispatched an army under the command of one of his generals, Megabyxos, who served as the governor of Syria. The king's army relieved Memphis, defeated the rebels and their Greek supporters, and after a blockade of 18 months seized the island of Prosopitis. After the Greek fleet was destroyed, the rebel leader Inaros and 6,000 Greeks surrendered. The Athenians suffered another defeat when 50 of their ships sailed up the Nile and were attacked by the Persians and their Egyptian allies. The intervention in Egypt thus ended in a major disaster for Athens.

The defeat in Egypt and the ongoing conflict and warfare in mainland Greece forced Athens to gradually reconsider its confrontational policy vis-à-vis the Achaemenid Empire, although in 450 BCE, after concluding a five-year peace with Sparta, the Athenian Kimon attacked the island of Cyprus. A year later in 449 BCE, Athens sent a delegation to the Persian capital of Susa to negotiate a peace treaty with Artaxerxes I. The Peace of Callias between the Persian Empire and the Delian League, led by Athens, ended the so-called Persian Wars. The treaty granted autonomy to the Ionian states of Asia Minor. Persian ships were prohibited from sailing in the Aegean. In return, Athens withdrew its forces permanently from Egypt and Cyprus and agreed to not interfere with the Persian Empire's territorial possessions in Asia Minor, Cyprus, Egypt, and Libya.

War between the Achaemenid Empire and Athens had ended, but the policy of Artaxerxes to fuel conflict among the Greek states would continue with dramatic results during the reigns of his successors. Learning from the military blunders of his father, Xerxes I, in Greece, Artaxerxes adopted the policy of utilizing his empire's enormous financial resources to encourage conflict and war among the Greek city-states, particularly Sparta and Athens. Instead of organizing large armies and marching long distances, the empire's new strategy called for forming alliances with Greek city-states that had sought its support against those that had adopted a hostile attitude toward the empire. The Greek author Thucydides informs us that in the midst of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) between Athenian and Spartan allies, the Athenians arrested a Persian named Artaphernes who was on his way to Sparta. The Athenians took the Persian messenger to Athens and translated the dispatches he was carrying. In these messages, Artaxerxes had written the Spartans that he did not know what they wanted because among "the many ambassadors they had sent him no two ever told the same story; if however they were prepared to speak plainly they might send him some envoys with his Persian" messenger (Thucydides: 4:50). As long as Artaxerxes I was alive, the Persians maintained a posture of neutrality in the Peloponnesian War, but during the reign of his successor, Darius II,

Persian diplomacy backed by Persian gold played an important role in ensuring Sparta's devastating victory over Athens.

In the Jewish tradition, Artaxerxes I is portrayed as a king who continued with the tolerant religious and cultural policies of Cyrus the Great. As with Cyrus, Artaxerxes supported the efforts of the Jewish religious leadership to establish its authority over the Jewish community in Palestine. In 458 BCE, the Jews of Babylon requested from Artaxerxes that he allow the Jewish priest Ezra to visit Palestine, with full authority over the affairs of the Jewish community there, and to enforce the book of the law as the will of the king. Ezra was permitted to return to Jerusalem with 1,500 Jewish families who formerly had lived in exile. However, when disputes erupted among the Jews, Artaxerxes intervened and dispatched his cupbearer and trusted confidant, Nehemiah, to settle the quarrel. As a result, the temple and walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in 441 BCE, and the Jewish high priest was proclaimed the ruler of Jerusalem and Judaea.

As had been the case with Cyrus the Great, Darius I, and Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I was an ambitious and accomplished builder. His royal inscription at Persepolis near Shiraz in southern Iran states that Artaxerxes completed the throne hall of his father, Xerxes, thus contributing to the construction of the palace complex, which was originally built by his grandfather, Darius, and then significantly expanded and enlarged by his father, Xerxes. After a long reign of 40 years, Artaxerxes I died in 424 BCE. The tomb of Artaxerxes I is located at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in the southern Iranian province of Fars.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius II; Xerxes I

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Artaxerxes II

Artaxerxes II (Old Persian: Artakhshacha II) was a king of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty who ruled from 404 to 359 BCE. The older son of Darius II, he ascended the Persian throne upon the death of his father. His title in Greek, Mnemon, translates as "mindful." Artaxerxes II ruled for 46 years and was succeeded upon his death by his son Ochos, who ascended the Achaemenid throne as Artaxerxes III. The Greek author Plutarch wrote that from the very beginning of his reign there existed a tension between Artaxerxes and his younger brother, Cyrus, who was the favorite son of their mother. Artaxerxes intended to kill his younger brother, but through the intercession of their mother, the new king allowed Cyrus to return to Sardis in Asia Minor and remain the governor of the western provinces of the Persian Empire. Shortly after Artaxerxes II became king, a revolt in Egypt, which had been brewing since the latter part of his father's reign, finally erupted. Egypt broke away from the Achaemenid Empire and declared its independence. Persian authority would not be reestablished in Egypt until the reign of Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BCE).

A year after Artaxerxes II lost Egypt, his younger brother, Cyrus (also known as Cyrus the Younger), who served as the governor of Asia Minor, revolted against him. Cyrus raised an army that included a large unit of Greek mercenaries and marched to Mesopotamia, where the Persian army led by his brother Artaxerxes II was waiting for him. The two armies joined battle in 401 BCE at Cunaxa on the left bank of the Euphrates River, 50 miles north of Babylon in present-day southern Iraq. Cyrus was defeated and killed after he had attacked and wounded his brother Artaxerxes. The bulk of Cyrus's army was routed, and the Greek commanders who had participated in the campaign were executed, but according to the Greek officer and author Xenophon, a group of Greek mercenaries (some 10,000 men) who had fought with the ill-fated Persian prince returned to their homeland by way of Asia Minor and the Black Sea. This defeat and retreat were turned into a story of heroism and perseverance by Xenophon (430–350 BCE) in *Anabasis* (March of the Ten Thousand). Xenophon depicted Cyrus the Younger as a gifted, magnetic, and yet tragic leader.

Artaxerxes II reversed the pro-Sparta policy of his father, Darius II, and lent his support to Athens and its allies. Artaxerxes recognized that the defeated and demoralized Athenians could no longer pose a threat to Persian rule, but a rejuvenated and confident Sparta could potentially cause trouble in the western provinces of his empire. The conflict with Sparta headed by its king, Agesilaos, did not go well at first, but through a combination of bribing and good generalship, the Persians and their Greek allies seized the upper hand, destroying the

Spartan fleet in the Battle of Cnidus off the southwestern coast of Asia Minor in the summer of 394 BCE. Sparta lost its entire fleet and suffered heavy casualties. The Persian forces and their allies then moved against Spartan-occupied cities and liberated them. The Persian policy of playing Athens against Sparta exhausted the Greek cities and forced them to send their ambassadors to the Persian capital, where they agreed to the Peace of the King (387–386 BCE). According to this agreement, Persian rule returned to all the Greek cities of Asia, including Ionia in Asia Minor, along with the island of Cyprus. Artaxerxes II achieved this result by the brilliant use of diplomacy and Persian gold. The Persian policy of inciting conflict between Athens and Sparta reignited the war between the two Greek states. When the two exhausted and war-torn city-states ended their war, Thebes, which dominated the region of Boeotia in central Greece, attacked them with support from Artaxerxes II and scored a decisive victory over both.

The overwhelming success of Artaxerxes vis-à-vis Greece masked the growing weakness of the Achaemenid central government, which was facing an increasing number of revolts in its western provinces. There, satraps who had accumulated enormous power were challenging the power of the Persian king and forming their own armies and alliances. The revolt of the king's satraps throughout the 360s BCE posed a serious threat to the security and survival of the Achaemenid state. Among these, the most menacing was the revolt of Datames, the satrap of Cappadocia in central Asia Minor. Equally alarming was the rebellion of Ariobarzanes, the governor of Dascylium in northwestern Asia Minor. By 362 BCE, the revolts of the king's satraps in Asia Minor and the Egyptian attack on Syria and Phoenicia had brought the Persian state to the brink of defeat and disintegration. But at the very moment when everything seemed to be going against the Persian king, the tables were turned on his opponents, and the threats from the empire's western provinces as well as from Egypt disappeared.

In Asia Minor, Orontes, the aging son-in-law of Artaxerxes, organized the assassination of Datames, the satrap of Cappadocia. Orontes also arrested Ariobarzanes, the governor of Dascylium, and sent him as a prisoner to his royal master. As for the threat from Egypt, a palace coup dethroned the Egyptian pharaoh Takhos, who at the time was in Phoenicia. The humiliated pharaoh was forced to seek refuge at the Persian court, while his ally, Straton, the king of Sidon (in present-day southern Lebanon), was murdered by his wife. King Agesilaos of Sparta, who had formed an alliance with Takhos, left Egypt and died aboard a ship as he sailed home. By the time he died in 359 BCE, Artaxerxes II ruled an empire temporarily freed from

internal strife.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes III; Cyrus the Younger; Darius II; *Prophets:* Xenophon; Primary Documents: Document 15; Document 16

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Artaxerxes III

Artaxerxes III (Old Persian: Artakhshacha) was a king of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty who ruled from 359 to 338 BCE. The son of Artaxerxes II, who had ruled the Persian Achaemenid Empire from 404 BCE to 359 BCE, Artaxerxes III ruled for nearly 26 years. Upon his murder, he was succeeded by one of his sons, Arses, who ruled from 338 to 336 BCE.

Beginning in 363 BCE before becoming king, Artaxerxes III had acted as the commander of his father's army. In the first few years of his reign, the new king had to focus his attention on the rebellion of Artabazos, the Persian satrap of Phrygia in western Asia Minor. Artabazos enjoyed a friendly relationship with Greek commanders from Athens and Thebes, which allowed him to include Greek mercenaries in his army. Though the Persian satrap managed twice to defeat the armies sent against him by the Persian king, he was finally forced to flee to Macedonia and seek refuge at the court of the Macedonian ruler Philip. Artabazos was eventually pardoned by Artaxerxes III and returned home, where he would serve the Achaemenid state with distinction. After the fall of the Achaemenid Empire at the hands of Alexander the Macedon, Artabazos would be appointed as governor of Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan.

After freeing himself from his unruly satrap, Artaxerxes III organized a campaign against Egypt. He had most probably been preparing the Achaemenid army for an invasion of Egypt during the last years of his father's reign. Egypt had revolted against Artaxerxes II and declared its independence in 404/403 BCE. The efforts of

Artaxerxes II to recapture the country had failed. The armies of Artaxerxes III also failed in their first campaign against Egypt, but the Persian king did not give up. In its second campaign, the Achaemenid army was led by the governors of Abar Nahra ("Beyond the River," i.e., Euphrates), a region that extended from Amanus in present-day southern Turkey and northern Syria to the Sinai and included the island of Cyprus as well as Cilicia, the south coastal region of Asia Minor. The Persian forces attacked Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon) but were pushed back. In 345 BCE, Artaxerxes III assumed command of his army and attacked Sidon in southern Lebanon, capturing the city and executing its king, Tennes. The road was now open to invade Egypt. The invasion was delayed, however, by a revolt on the island of Cyprus, which was suppressed with the support of the Athenians.

Egypt at this time was ruled by Nektanebo II, a pharaoh who had seized the throne of the country 16 years before by staging a palace revolt against the former pharaoh, Takhos. When the two armies joined in battle, an Achaemenid division, which included mercenaries, defeated a unit of the pharaoh's Greek mercenaries. Nektanebo II panicked and fled to Memphis, the capital of Egypt. The flight of the Egyptian ruler caused his forces stationed at Pelusium on the eastern edge of the Nile Delta to negotiate a surrender. The Achaemenid armies under the capable leadership of two of the king's most prominent commanders, Bagoas and Mentor, pushed south toward Memphis. Garrison after garrison fell without any fight. Thus, by the summer of 243 BCE, Egypt was once again a province of the Achaemenid Empire.

Once the reconquest of Egypt was complete, Artaxerxes III sent Bagoas to subdue the rebellious Cadusii, a tribal group that inhabited the southwestern shore of the Caspian Sea south of the Aras River. The Cadusii had been in a state of revolt ever since 405 BCE. While the king's forces were suppressing the Cadusii, the king's general, Mentor, was dispatched to western Asia Minor, where he restored order by negotiating with the former rebel satrap Artabazos and convincing the refugee governor and his family to return home.

Toward the end of Artaxerxes III's reign, Macedonia under its king, Philip II, began to emerge as a threat to the security of the Persian possessions in Asia Minor. In 340 BCE, Philip attacked Perinthos in northern Greece with the goal of establishing himself as the master of the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, which connected the Black Sea to the Aegean. He then defeated the Greeks (the Athenian and Theban forces) in the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, permanently ending the independence of the Greek city-states. Given the threat he represented, the Achaemenids were probably relieved when they received the news of Philip's assassination in 336 BCE.

Artaxerxes III had restored peace and order to the Achaemenid state, but at the height of his success the king and all but one of his sons were assassinated by his close confidant, Bagoas, who cherished the dream of ruling the empire through a puppet. In this case the puppet was to be Arses, the remaining son of Artaxerxes III, whose life had been spared so he could play the role of the nominal ruler, while Bagoas emerged as the sole power behind the throne. Having become aware of the heinous crimes of Bagoas against his father and brothers, Arses tried to punish the traitor, but he and his sons were also murdered. The Achaemenid royal house was decimated by these assassinations. In fact, only one prince of the ruling dynasty could still claim a direct and legitimate link to the Achaemenid male line. This ill-fated prince was a relative of Artaxerxes III who at the time served as the governor of Armenia and would ascend the throne as Darius III.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Arses; Artaxerxes II; Darius III

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Cambyses I

Cambyses I (Old Persian: Kambujiya I) was the father of Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE). Cambyses I was the ruler of Anshan, which was located in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars (Old Persian: Parsa). He ruled most probably between 600 BCE and 559 BCE. On his cylinder excavated in Babylon, Cyrus the Great stated that he was the "son of Cambyses, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus [Cyrus I], great king, king of Anshan" (Curtis: 42). The Greek author Herodotus claimed that Cambyses was not a king but rather a Persian from "a good family and quiet habits" who was handpicked by Astyages, the king of Media, as the husband for his daughter, Mandane (Herodotus: 1.107–108). Another Greek author, however, namely Xenophon, called Cambyses "the king of Persians" who married Mandane, the daughter of the Median king Astyages (Xenophon: 1.2.1).

See also: *Ancient Provinces:* Anshan; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great

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Cambyses II

Cambyses II (Old Persian: Kambujiya II) was the elder son of Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire who succeeded his father after his death in 530 BCE and ruled until 522 BCE. Cambyses's mother was Cassandane, who was loved and highly respected by Cyrus the Great. Cambyses had a younger brother named Bardiya and three sisters, Atossa, Artystone, and Roxane. Cambyses II was named after his grandfather Cambyses I, who was the king of Anshan in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars (ancient Parsa) probably from 600 to 559 BCE. As the elder son of his father, Cambyses accompanied Cyrus the Great during his campaign against the Neo-Babylonian Empire. After the conquest of Babylon, Cambyses was appointed by his father as the king of Babylon. Toward the end of Cyrus's reign, for a short time Cambyses acted as a co-regent and shared the titles "king of Babylon" and "king of the lands" with his father. Cambyses II ascended the Persian throne in 530 BCE after his father was killed in a campaign against the Massagetae, a Scythian group in Central Asia. In 525 BCE after restoring order to the vast empire he had inherited from his father, Cambyses marched against Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon) and Egypt. The Phoenicians submitted voluntarily to the Persian king. The conquest of Egypt, however, required a major military campaign and the personal participation and leadership of the Persian monarch. In attacking Egypt, Cambyses II was continuing his father's policy of expanding the boundaries of the Persian Empire to North Africa. His principal objective was the conquest of the agriculturally rich Nile River Valley, which could provide the Persian state with an important strategic foothold in Africa while at the same time significantly enhancing and augmenting the economic and political power of the Persian king.

The Persian army first established a foothold on the eastern frontiers of Egypt. Scrambling to craft a military coalition capable of deterring the Persians from invading his country, Amasis, the pharaoh

of Egypt, formed an alliance with Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos, a Greek island situated off the coast of Asia Minor in the eastern Aegean Sea. This unreliable ally, however, abandoned the pharaoh shortly before the invasion of Egypt by the Persians. Worse, the commander of the pharaoh's forces also deserted his royal master and defected to Cambyses. Before the Persians invaded his country, Amasis died in 525 BCE. He was succeeded by Psammetichus III, who was left with the task of defending Egypt against the Persian invaders. When the two armies joined battle, the Persians scored two quick victories, first at Pelusium and then at Memphis, where the new pharaoh was captured. Following the policy of his father, which was to retain a defeated ruler as a tribute-paying vassal, Cambyses spared the life of Psammetichus III. The relationship between the two monarchs, however, deteriorated quickly when Cambyses was informed that the defeated pharaoh was involved in a conspiracy to stir a rebellion against Persian rule. Psammetichus III was executed by order of Cambyses. Herodotus and later Strabo described Cambyses as a brutal and cold-blooded murderer and madman who looted Egyptian temples and insulted Egyptian gods and priests (Herodotus: 3.30). According to these authors, the brutality and savagery of Cambyses reached its climax when the Persian king killed Apis, the Egyptian sacred bull (Herodotus: 3.27–30). The Egyptian sources refute these fantastic stories, however, and indicate that Persian rule did not leave an adverse impact on Egypt and that Cambyses behaved with respect toward Egyptian religious beliefs, customs, and traditions. Herodotus also claimed that Cambyses invaded Nubia (southern Egypt and northern Sudan). This campaign was aborted, however, as a result of inadequate provisions.

Cambyses departed Egypt for Persia in 522 BCE after he was informed that a man claiming to be his brother Bardiya (the younger son of Cyrus the Great) had proclaimed himself king. On his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–480 BCE), who at the time served as an officer in the army of Cambyses, claimed that the man who had revolted against Cambyses was not Bardiya, the younger brother of the king, but rather a false pretender—a magus, or priest, named Gaumata (Kent: 119–120). Darius stated that before leaving for Egypt, Cambyses II had secretly ordered the execution of his brother to prevent a palace coup in his absence. The murder of the king's brother was, however, kept a secret and was only known to a handful of individuals within the royal court. In 522 BCE before he could reach Persia and quell the rebellion, Cambyses died suddenly.

The main historical source for the reign of Cambyses II is the Greek author Herodotus, who depicted the Persian monarch as a mad,

violent, and bloodthirsty despot bent on inflicting pain and suffering on everyone, including the people of Egypt and members of his own family. More recent scholarship contradicts Herodotus and indicates that the unsavory depiction of Cambyses by the Greek author is largely unfounded and baseless and may even have been fueled and influenced by the propaganda waged by Darius I, who seized the Persian throne through a military coup shortly after Cambyses's death.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bisotun Inscription; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; Darius I

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Cyrus II the Great

Cyrus II the Great (Kurush II) is one of the most important figures in the history of Iran, the Near East, and the world. He is also the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire (r. 550 BCE–330 BCE) and one of the most influential political figures in the history of the ancient world. The date of his birth is unknown, but most historians agree that he died in 530 BCE. Cyrus was the son of Cambyses I (Kambujiya I), a grandson of Cyrus I (Kurush I), and a descendant of Teispes (Chishpish). Cyrus II's great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were all kings of Anshan, a small kingdom in present-day southern Iran near the city of Shiraz. Anshan was an important urban center in the eastern part of the Elamite Empire. According to the Greek author Herodotus, Cyrus was born from the union between Cambyses, a Persian, and Mandane, the daughter of Astyages, the king of Media. If his mother was indeed Mandane, then Cyrus descended on both his father's and mother's sides from a royal lineage.

After the death of his father in 559 or 558 BCE, Cyrus ascended the throne as the new ruler of Anshan. At the time of Cyrus's ascension to the throne, four powerful states dominated the political and economic

life of the Near East: Media, Lydia, Babylonia, and Egypt. Both the father and grandfather of Cyrus were vassals of the kings of Media. In either 554/553 or 550/549 BCE, a conflict erupted between Cyrus and the Median king Astyages. It is impossible to know with any certainty whether Cyrus or Astyages initiated the conflict between the Medes and the Persians. According to Herodotus, Astyages summoned Cyrus to his court after learning that the Persians intended to revolt and free themselves from the Median yoke, but Cyrus responded by sending a threatening message to the Median king that "he would be there a good deal sooner than Astyages liked" (Herodotus: 1.127). The author Polyaenus reported that Cyrus was defeated in three different battles with the Medes. Despite these setbacks, the king of Anshan rallied his men and led them in a fourth battle with the Medes at Pasargadae in present-day southern Iran near the city of Shiraz. The Persians were defeated again and fled the battlefield, but when they saw their wives and children, they were "ashamed of themselves and turned around to face the enemy," routing the Medes "who were pursuing in disorder" and winning "so great a victory that Cyrus no longer needed another battle against them" (Polyaenus: 7.6.1). Another source, namely Ctesias, claims that after the conquest of Ecbatana, the Median capital, Astyages was captured while hiding in the attic or vaults of the royal palace together with his daughter Amytis and her husband Spitamas (*Ctesias' History of Persia:* 170). Nicolaus of Damascus, however, claimed that Astyages escaped his capital after it fell into the hands of the Persians and he was captured in another battle with Cyrus. The Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle of Nabonidus* contradicts the Greek accounts and reports that the Median king Astyages "marched against Cyrus," the king of Anshan, but his army "revolted against him" and delivered him "in fetters" to Cyrus, who attacked the Median capital, Ecbatana, and seized all the silver, gold, and other valuables of the country as booty and carried them off back to Anshan (Pritchard: 235). Cyrus treated Astyages with kindness and compassion and allowed him to live at his court until he passed away (Herodotus: 1.130). One source even claimed that Astyages was appointed by Cyrus as the governor, or satrap, of Carmania (Kerman) in present-day southeastern Iran.

The fall of the Median Empire proved to be a turning point in the career of Cyrus. The conquest allowed him to emerge as the master of Assyria and Urartu in eastern Asia Minor (present-day Armenia and eastern Turkey). Under Cyrus, the new unified kingdom of Persia and Media also became a neighbor of the wealthy and powerful Lydia, a kingdom that ruled the central and western regions of Asia Minor. As a successor to the Median kings, Cyrus was recognized as the master of the eastern provinces of the Median state, including Hyrcania (Old Persian: Varkana), the region of present-day Gorgan in northern Iran,

and Parthia (Old Persian: Parthava) in northeastern Iran. His rule may have extended as far east as Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan.

In 547 BCE Cyrus moved against Croesus, the king of Lydia, who was known as one of the wealthiest men of his time. The first battle between the two kings was inconclusive. Croesus returned to his capital, Sardis, in western Asia Minor for the winter, hoping to rest his troops and regroup. He also sent messages to his allies, including Sparta and Egypt, pleading for support, but his allies did not get the opportunity to send him reinforcements. Instead of retreating back to the interior of his kingdom, Cyrus attacked Sardis shortly after the conclusion of the first battle, denying any opportunity for Croesus to reorganize. A Persian army stormed the Lydian capital and captured it. Croesus was taken prisoner and brought to Cyrus, who spared his life and treated him with kindness. The fall of Lydia was followed by the conquest of the Ionian cities on the Aegean coast. Cyrus did not personally participate in these conquests but instead entrusted them to his generals.

After the conquest of Lydia, Cyrus shifted his attention from west to east. From 545 to 539 BCE, he most probably conquered vast areas in eastern Iran and Central Asia. These conquests established the northeastern border of the Persian Empire at the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), which originates from the Tien Shan Mountains in present-day Kyrgyzstan and, after flowing through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, empties into the Aral Sea. To the east, the frontiers of the Persian Empire stretched into present-day southern Afghanistan.

In 539 BCE, Cyrus moved against Babylonia. As the Persian king and his army closed in, the Babylonian monarch Nabonidus fled, and his army disintegrated. The conquest of Babylon was celebrated by Cyrus on a cylinder with an inscription of 35 lines. This remarkable clay cylinder, which was discovered by the archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam in Babylon in 1879, is one of the most significant artifacts of the ancient world. It recounts the peaceful conquest of Babylon by Cyrus and his army, who faced no resistance as they entered one of the most important urban centers of the ancient world. The cylinder also describes the compassion, deference, and respect shown by Cyrus toward all the people of Babylon and their gods. The vassal kings who paid tribute to the king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire rushed to the court of Cyrus to swear their allegiance to the new leader. Thus, Phoenicia, centered on the coastline of today's Lebanon, as well as Syria and Palestine joined the Persian Empire.

The Cyrus Cylinder, housed today in the British Museum in London, was issued by the Persian monarch, Cyrus the Great, in 539 BCE to commemorate his conquest of Babylon. The cylinder, which contains an inscription in Akkadian, was discovered by the archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam at the site of the temple of Marduk in Babylon in 1879. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

With the submission of Palestine, the lands that had formerly constituted the kingdoms of Israel and Judah also fell into the hands of Cyrus. Cyrus issued a proclamation ordering the repair and reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple. The Jews, who had been living in captivity in Babylon since the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, were freed and allowed to return to Palestine to build their temple. The support of Cyrus for the Jewish cause brought him praise from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, who declared him God's shepherd and the Lord's anointed, a proclamation recorded in Isaiah 44:28–45:1 in the Hebrew scriptures. After the conquest of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Cyrus returned to Central Asia to pacify the Scythian tribes.

NAMES OF GODS, PEOPLE, AND PLACES MENTIONED IN THE CYRUS CYLINDER INSCRIPTION

In the Cyrus Cylinder inscription, Cyrus II the Great mentioned the names of several gods, people, and places. In order of appearance, these were (1) Marduk, the city god of Babylon and the patron of the Neo-Babylonian kings; (2)

Belshazzar, the firstborn son of Nabonidus, the last native king of Babylon (r. 556–539 BCE), who acted as regent for his father during his absence in Teima in Arabia; (3) Esagil, the great temple dedicated to Marduk in Babylon south of the ziggurat tower complex Etemenanki; (4) Enlil, the second most powerful of the ancient gods of Mesopotamia whose place was usurped by Marduk; (5) Shuanna, a name for the city of Babylon, here standing for the whole city but in fact the name of its southernmost quarter; (6) Sumer and Akkad, the old names for southern Mesopotamia, later Babylon; (7) Tintir, the old Sumerian name for the city of Babylon; (8) Anshan, the ancient Elamite city, modern-day Tal-e Malyan, northwest of Shiraz in southern Iran; (9) Guti, the name for the inhabitants of the area between the Zagros Mountains and the Tigris River, referring specifically to Iranians, including the Medes; (10) Nabu, the god of writing, son of Marduk and his wife Zarpanitu; (11) Amurru, the west land; (12) Ashur, one of the old Assyrian capital cities in the north of Iraq on the upper reaches of the Tigris River; (13) Susa, the Elamite capital city in southwestern Iran; (14) Eshnunna, the central Babylonian city on the Diyala River in Iraq; (15) Zamban, a city in the northeast; (16) Meturnu, a city located roughly between Zamban and Eshnunna; (17) Der, an ancient city located east of the Tigris River on the border between Sumer and Elam; (18) Tigris, the river that with the Euphrates defined ancient Mesopotamia, the "land between the rivers"; (19) Imgur-Enlil, the famous inner wall of the city of Babylon; and (20) Ashurbanipal, the last great king of Assyria (685–627 BCE), a warrior and librarian who undertook restoration work in Babylon.

Source: Irving Finkel, ed., *The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia's Proclamation from Ancient Babylon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

According to Herodotus, Cyrus was killed in Central Asia in a battle against the Massagetae, a Scythian tribe. The death of the Persian king in 530 BCE did not end the conquests of the Persian state, which would continue under Cyrus's successors, Cambyses II and Darius I. The body of the fallen king was carried back to Pasargadae on Dasht-e Morghab (Plain of the Water Bird) near the city of Shiraz in southern Iran. There he was laid to rest in a simple mausoleum. According to classical sources, the mausoleum containing the king's golden coffin stood in the midst of a park surrounded by a grove and lush meadows (Arrian: 6.29). Cyrus had married a Persian princess, Cassandane, and they had two sons and three daughters. Their oldest son, Cambyses, ascended the throne after the death of his father. Their second son was Bardiya, whose fate has been subjected to some controversy. Cyrus and Cassandane's three daughters were Atossa, Artystone, and Roxane.

Cyrus has been celebrated as a great conqueror who established the largest empire of antiquity. Upon examining his life and career, it is impossible to escape the fundamental fact that although he was a brilliant king, warrior, and general, the true greatness of Cyrus lies in his introduction of a new concept of kingship, one that rejected the notion that exercise of power always required the use of violence and

coercion. Instead, it emphasized the benefits of benevolent rule based on compassion, persuasion, and respect for all cultures, religions, and belief systems.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cambyses II; Darius I; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; *Cyropaedia;* Primary Documents: Document 6; Document 7; Document 8

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Cyrus the Younger

The Persian Achaemenid king Darius II had two sons: Artaxerxes (Old Persian: Artakhshacha) and Cyrus (Kurush). The older son, Artaxerxes, ascended the Persian throne upon the death of Darius II in 404 BCE and ruled until 359 BCE. According to several classical sources, Artaxerxes II was opposed by his younger brother Cyrus, who viewed himself as more deserving of kingship than his older brother. Before the two brothers could clash over the throne, their mother interceded with Artaxerxes and secured for Cyrus the governorship of the western provinces of the Persian Empire.

Shortly after Artaxerxes II became king, Egypt broke away from

the Achaemenid Empire and declared its independence. Persian authority would not be reestablished in Egypt until the reign of Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BCE). A year after Artaxerxes II had lost Egypt, his brother Cyrus revolted against him. Cyrus raised an army, which included a large unit of Greek mercenaries, and marched through Asia Minor to Mesopotamia, where the Persian army led by Artaxerxes II was waiting for him. In 401 BCE when the two armies joined battle at Cunaxa on the left bank of the Euphrates River 50 miles north of Babylon in present-day southern Iraq, Cyrus was defeated. The Persian prince was killed on the battlefield after he had attacked and wounded Artaxerxes. The bulk of Cyrus's army was routed, and the Greek commanders who had participated in the campaign were executed, but a group of Greek mercenaries (according to Greek sources some 10,000 men) who had fought with the ill-fated Persian prince managed to return to Greece. This defeat and retreat were turned into a story of heroism and perseverance by the Greek officer and author Xenophon (431/430–356/354 BCE) in *Anabasis* [Retreat of the Ten Thousand]. Xenophon depicted Cyrus the Younger as a gifted, magnetic, and yet tragic leader who was most deserving of the Persian throne. This opinion not only reflects the friendship that the Greek author enjoyed with the Persian prince but also the popularity that Cyrus the Younger enjoyed among the Greeks of Asia Minor.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes II; *Prophets:* Xenophon; Primary Documents: Document 16

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Darius I

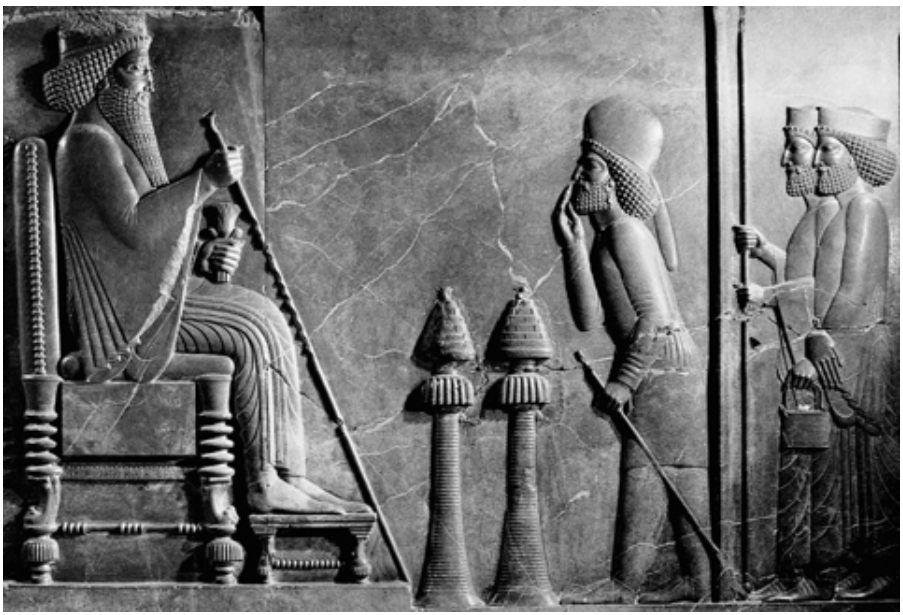
Darius I (Old Persian: Daryavaush I) was a king of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE). He ruled from 522 to 486 BCE. It was during the reign of Darius I that the Achaemenid state reached the zenith of its power and its greatest territorial extant, emerging as the largest empire the world had ever seen. The empire stretched from the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan to the Danube River in Southeast Europe and from the Aral Sea in Central Asia to Libya in North Africa.

Darius was the eldest son of Hystaspes (Old Persian: Vishtaspa) and Rhodugune (Old Persian: Vadagauna). Before seizing the Persian throne, Darius was a high-ranking officer in the Persian army. He rose to power after the death of Cambyses II, the son of Cyrus the Great, the second king of the Achaemenid dynasty, in 522 BCE. Cambyses was in Egypt when he was informed that a man claiming to be his younger brother Bardiya had revolted against him. Before he could reach Persia and quell the rebellion, however, Cambyses died. The seizure of the Persian throne by the man who claimed to be Bardiya was opposed by a group of Persian army officers, including Darius. In his inscription at Bisotun near Kermanshah in western Iran, Darius claimed that the man who had revolted against Cambyses was not Bardiya but rather a lookalike magus (priest) named Gaumata. Darius asserted that before leaving for Egypt, Cambyses had secretly ordered the murder of his brother to prevent a palace coup in his absence. The murder of the king's brother was, however, kept secret and was known to only a handful of individuals within the imperial court. Denouncing the new king as an impostor, Darius, with support from six fellow Persian officers, marched against the new ruler and killed him in Media in western Iran. The six officers who joined Darius in a plot to remove Gaumata/Bardiya were Vidafarna (Intaphernes), Utana (Otanes), Gaubaruva (Gobryas), Vidarna (Hydarnes), Bagabuxsha (Megabyzus), and Ardumanish.

Darius became king in the autumn of 522 BCE. Mass insurrections erupted in several provinces of the empire shortly after he seized the throne but were suppressed, with rebel leaders captured, tortured, and executed. In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, Darius stated that he and his army commanders fought a total of 19 battles in the first year of his reign. The rebel leaders Darius defeated in the first year of his reign were Achina, who proclaimed himself the king of Elam; Nidintu-Bel, who proclaimed himself king in Babylon; Phraortes, who proclaimed himself king of Media; Martiya, a Persian who wished to be the king of Elam; Cicantakhma, a Sargatian; Vahyazdata, a Persian who claimed to be Smerdis; Arkha, an Armenian who claimed to be a son of Nabonidus, the Neo-Babylonian king who was defeated by Cyrus II the Great; and Frada, who hailed from Margiana. In the third year of Darius's reign another rebellion broke out in Elam (in southwestern Iran), which was crushed by the Persian army. In 519 BCE, Darius attacked the Scythian tribes who lived beyond either the Caspian Sea or the Black Sea. He defeated the Scythians and captured their leader, Skunkha, who was subsequently executed.

In 517 BCE Darius traveled to Egypt, where he won the support of the country's priests by restoring their privileges. A few years later the

Persians used Egypt as their territorial base to push westward and occupy Libya. From Egypt, Darius shifted his focus eastward to India. Before invading that country, however, the Persian king organized an exploratory naval mission, which first traveled along the Indus River to the Indian Ocean and from there first west and then northward to the Red Sea, reaching Egypt near the present-day Suez 30 months later. Darius then marched to India and seized the Indus Valley as far south as the region of Sind in present-day southeastern Pakistan.



A Median officer pays homage to the Persian king of kings Darius I the Great. During the reign of Darius I, the Persian Achaemenid Empire reached its zenith of power. Darius I ruled a vast empire, which extended from the river Jaxartes (Syr Darya) in Central Asia to Libya in North Africa, and from the Indus River in South Asia to the Danube River in southeastern Europe. (Roger Wood/Corbis)

The next campaign of Darius brought him to Europe. The principal objective of this campaign was to establish Persian control over the Scythians of the Danube River basin. Persian army units marched through Thrace (present-day European Turkey, northeastern Greece, and southern Bulgaria), while the Persian fleet sailed through the Black Sea to the mouth of the Danube to build a bridge for the army to cross. The Scythians declined the challenge and retreated deep into the interior of their territory, forcing the Persian monarch to overextend his communication lines and food supplies. Darius, however, refused to play their game and returned home. As a result of this European campaign, the north Aegean Sea region as well as Macedonia accepted Persian suzerainty.

Darius divided the Persian Empire into provinces, or satrapies,

each with its own governor, or satrap. Provinces were assessed to determine the amount of taxes each was expected to pay. Taxes were paid to the central government in the form of annual tribute. Darius also introduced the first Persian gold and silver coins. These coins came to represent the monetary standard of the Achaemenid state. He also invested heavily in construction projects, including roads and canals. Darius recognized the importance of an efficient communication system and the fundamental role of roads and highways in facilitating the movement of troops, merchants, and trade caravans. The most impressive of these highways was the Royal Road, which linked the capital city of Susa in southwestern Iran to the city of Sardis in western Asia Minor. Darius also ordered the building of a canal between the Red Sea and the Nile, a forerunner to the Suez Canal, which was constructed more than 2,000 years later in the second half of the 19th century. Darius's other building projects included numerous royal residences and palaces. Among these, the most impressive was the magnificent palace complex of Persepolis in southern Iran. This ambitious project was completed by his successors.

PROVINCES OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE UNDER DARIUS I

According to the Greek author Herodotus, the Persian king Darius I divided his vast empire into 20 satrapies, or provinces. In his long and detailed inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, Darius listed 23 countries as the provinces contained in his empire. These included Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Sardis, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandhara, Sattagydia, Arachosia, Sind, Skudra, and Petasos-wearing Ionians. In another inscription, this one at Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran, Darius enumerated 29 provinces. This list excluded Persia but included Media, Elam, Parthia, Aria, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Sattagydia, Gandara, Sind, Amyrgian Scythians, Scythians with pointed caps, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Armenia, Cappadocia, Sardis, Ionia, Scythians who are across the sea, Skudra, Petasos-wearing Ionians, Libyans, Ethiopians, men of Maka, and Carians. The list from Naqsh-e Rostam demonstrates that at the zenith of its power, the Persian Achaemenid state extended from Sind and Gandhara in present-day Pakistan to Libya in North Africa.

In 499 BCE, the Ionians of Asia Minor revolted against the authority of the Persian king. With assistance from Athens and Eretria, the rebels sacked and burned the city of Sardis in present-day western Turkey. The Persians suppressed the Ionian revolt in 493 BCE. However, to prevent future military and political interference from Athens and other city-states of mainland Greece, Darius organized a campaign to attack and occupy Athens and Eretria. In 492 BCE a

Persian army seized Thrace and Macedonia, but the mission was aborted. The Persians withdrew a short time later as a result of bad weather and clashes with local tribes. In 490 BCE, the Persians crossed the Aegean Sea and captured Cyclades and Eretria on the island of Euboea. After they had landed on the Greek mainland, however, they were defeated by the Athenians in the Battle of Marathon. Though they were forced to retreat to their ships, the Persians proceeded with their attack on Athens but were forced to withdraw when they realized that the city and its residents had organized their defenses. Darius planned to return and complete the conquest of Greece, but he died in 486 BCE. The tomb of Darius is located at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in the southern Iranian province of Fars.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bisotun Inscription; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cambyses II; Xerxes I; Primary Documents: Document 9; Document 10; Document 12; Document 13

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Darius II

Darius II was a king of the Achaemenid dynasty who ruled from 423 to 404 BCE. He did not succeed his father, Artaxerxes I, when the latter died in 424 BCE. Artaxerxes I was succeeded first by his son Xerxes II, who was murdered by his brother Sogdianos. The usurper,

however, quickly alienated the elite palace guards when he executed their commander. Recognizing a golden opportunity to seize the throne, another son of Artaxerxes I, Ochos, who served as the governor of Hyrcania (Old Persian: Varkana, modern-day Gorgan), on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea, organized an army, marched against his brother, and defeated Sogdianos. The defeated usurper was put to death after only six and a half months on the throne.

Ochos then ascended the throne as Darius II. Sometime after becoming king, Darius II was forced to fight his brother Arsites, who was backed by Artyphios, son of the capable Persian commander Megabyxos. After suffering two defeats, the king's army managed to overcome the rebel prince and suppress the revolt. Both Arsites and Artyphios were executed. A revolt in Media in western Iran in 409/408 BCE was also put down, but another uprising on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea in the region of present-day Gilan in northern Iran continued for some time.

The most serious challenge to Persian rule during the reign of Darius II came from Sardis in western Anatolia. Sometime around 416 BCE, the Persian governor of Sardis, Pissouthnes, revolted against the authority of the Persian king. As the satrap since 440 BCE, Pissouthnes had established deep-rooted ties with the local population and had organized an army that included Greek mercenaries. Darius II sent one of his commanders, Tissaphernes, to suppress the revolt. Tissaphernes crushed the revolt and restored order. As a reward for his performance, Darius II appointed Tissaphernes the satrap (governor) of Sardis.

The crisis, however, did not pass. The son of Pissouthnes, a man by the name of Amorges, resumed his father's revolt with assistance from Athens between 414 and 412 BCE. This miscalculation by an overconfident Athens proved to be disastrous for the Athenians. Darius II responded to the Athenian meddling by dropping any pretense of neutrality in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) and threw all of his support behind the Spartan alliance, which was fighting Athens and its allies. The Persian backing ultimately allowed Sparta to defeat Athens and emerge as the supreme power on mainland Greece. After the Athenian fleet, which had been sent to capture Syracuse, was destroyed in 413 BCE, the Spartan navy also imposed its domination over the eastern half of the Aegean Sea. Meanwhile, the Persian governor Tissaphernes used the war between Sparta and Athens as an opportunity to reestablish Persian control over the Greek cities on Asia Minor's western coast and to arrest the rebellious Amorges.

Showing his interest in a positive outcome in Asia Minor, Darius II appointed his second son, Cyrus (Cyrus the Younger), as the

commander of Persian forces in the west. Cyrus, who nurtured a dream of becoming the ruler of the Persian Empire after the death of his father, was determined to cultivate the friendship of the Greeks, particularly the Spartans, who could provide him with troops in his impending confrontation with his older brother, Artaxerxes (future Artaxerxes II), over the succession to the Persian throne. Not surprisingly, Cyrus was thus anxious to hasten an end to the Peloponnesian War so he could recruit Greek mercenaries seeking new employment. Thus, Cyrus contributed generously to the Spartan war efforts, enabling the Spartans to defeat the Athenians and end the war in 404 BCE.

Shortly after the conclusion of war among the Greeks, Darius II died. He was succeeded by his older son, Artaxerxes. Some historians of Achaemenid Iran have identified the reign of Darius II as the period when the gradual decline of the Persian Empire began. These scholars point to the growing restlessness in various provinces of the empire but also cite the mounting influence of court eunuchs and their involvement in palace intrigues and plots. The tomb of Darius II is located at Naqsh-e Rostam, the necropolis of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty near Persepolis in southern Iran.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes I; Artaxerxes II

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Darius III

Darius III, the last king of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, ruled from 336 to 330 BCE. He was a relative of Artaxerxes III, who ruled the Persian Achaemenid Empire from 359 to 338 BCE. The reign of Darius III came to an end after Alexander the Macedon invaded and defeated the armies of the Achaemenid Empire in 333 and 331 BCE.

In 338 BCE, the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes III was murdered, together with most of his sons, by Bagoas, a close confidant of the king who had performed brilliantly in the Persian reconquest of Egypt.

Bagoas was not only an intelligent and capable commander but was also a ruthless and ambitious individual who dreamed of ruling the Achaemenid Empire. He kept Arses, one of the sons of Artaxerxes III, alive so he could use him as a puppet king. Arses, however, discovered the truth about the role of Bagoas in the murder of his father and brothers and tried to remove the conspirator, but Bagoas murdered Arses and his sons as well. Thus, the Achaemenid royal house was destroyed several years before the invasion of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Macedon. In a desperate search for a legitimate heir to the throne who could claim a direct link to the Achaemenid male line, the satrap (governor) of Armenia, Artashata (Ochos), known to the Greeks as Codommanos, was chosen as the new king. Artashata ascended the throne as Darius III (Old Persian: Daryavaush III).

The ambitious Bagoas retained his position and power, but soon the king and the minister were on a collision course. Darius III and Bagoas were not strangers. During the reign of Artaxerxes III, Bagoas had been sent by the king to subdue the rebellious Cadusii, a nomadic group that inhabited the southwestern shore of the Caspian Sea. The young Darius III had participated in the campaign against the Caspian mountaineers, displaying exceptional valor on the battlefield, which won him great praise and recognition. Bagoas suppressed the Cadusii revolt successfully, and Ochos was appointed the satrap of Armenia. Now the prince and the minister were back together fighting over who should rule the Achaemenid Empire. When Darius III tried to wrest the reins of power from the ambitious courtier, Bagoas tried to poison the king, but Darius was informed of the plot. The king forced the conspirator to drink the poisoned cup himself and end his own life.

After the death of Bagoas, Darius III tried to reestablish the authority of the central government, but he did not have sufficient time to reorganize. Dark clouds were gathering on the western frontiers of the empire. The rise of a young, powerful, and aggressive Macedonia posed a direct threat not only to the Achaemenid state but also to the Greek city-states, which were on the verge of being swallowed up by a superior military force. Toward the end of Artaxerxes III's reign, Macedonia under its king Philip II had emerged as a strong and unified state. In 340 BCE, Philip attacked Perinthos in northern Greece with the goal of establishing himself as the master of the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, which connected the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea. Alarmed by Macedonia's aggression, the Athenians sent an embassy to Artaxerxes III and requested an alliance with the Persian king. With support from Athens, Artaxerxes III sent an army that ejected the Macedonians from Perinthos, but Philip persisted nonetheless. He marched with a large force against Greece and defeated the armies of Athens and Thebes in the Battle of Chaeronea

in 338 BCE, permanently ending the independence of the Greek city-states. In 337 BCE, Philip organized the League of Corinth and declared his goal conveniently as the liberation of the Greek cities, which remained under Persian rule. In 336, he dispatched an army to Asia Minor as the first step toward a full-fledged invasion of the western provinces of the Achaemenid Empire. The planned invasion, however, came to a sudden end when Philip was assassinated in July 336.

The news of Philip's death provided temporary relief, but the Macedonian throne was passed to his son Alexander, who was determined to use his father's well-trained and well-organized army to attack Asia. In the spring of 334 BCE, Alexander crossed the Hellespont and began his conquest of Asia Minor. Darius had failed to prepare his armies for a Macedonian attack. The Macedonians therefore defeated an Achaemenid force at Granicus, where Alexander was almost killed. The Macedonian victory allowed Alexander to capture Sardis in western Asia Minor. The next confrontation between the two sides took place in 333 BCE at Issus in present-day southern Turkey near the city of Iskandarun. The battle resulted in a defeat for Darius III and his army. Darius fled the battlefield, and his mother, wife, infant son, and two of his daughters as well as several noble Persian ladies "fell into Alexander's hands" (Arrian: 2.12). Moving south along the present-day Lebanese coast, Alexander seized Tyre in southern Lebanon after a siege of seven months. While Alexander was in Syria, "envoys from Darius came with a request for the release of his mother, wife and children" (Arrian: 2.14). They also delivered a letter from Darius to Alexander in which the Persian king appealed for alliance and friendship between the Persian Empire and the kingdom of Macedonia. Alexander refused to release the members of the Persian royal family and dismissed a peaceful resolution to the conflict. From Syria and Phoenicia, Alexander marched against Gaza and then Egypt before turning east once again to confront Darius and his army in the Battle of Arbela in present-day northern Iraq on October 1, 331 BCE. The Achaemenid army was defeated once again after Darius III fled the battlefield.

As Alexander began his march on Babylon and Susa, Darius sought refuge in the summer capital of Hagmatana/Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) in western Iran. Meanwhile, Alexander seized Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis, the latter of which he destroyed by setting its palace complex on fire. After Alexander departed Persepolis, Darius and the Persian nobles accompanying him left Ecbatana for eastern Iran. They probably planned to connect with loyal units and commanders in the eastern provinces of the empire, particularly Bactria and Sogdiana; raise an army; and strike back. It is not certain

what happened at this point. Some historians maintain that Darius refused to flee any farther, forcing his loyal commanders to imprison him in a wagon. Regardless, by the time Alexander caught up with Darius III, the Achaemenid king was already dead, probably murdered by Bessus (the governor of Bactria) and the other Persian nobles who were fleeing with him. With the death of Darius III in the summer of 330 BCE, the Persian Achaemenid Empire came to an end.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Arses; Artaxerxes III; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Bessus

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Sogdianos

Sogdianos was one of the sons of Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE), a king of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE) who ruled for a short time after killing his older brother, Xerxes II, in 423 BCE. After the death of Artaxerxes I, his son Xerxes ascended the throne. Forty-five days after Xerxes II had assumed the reins of power, Sogdianos killed his brother and proclaimed himself the king. His actions while on the throne quickly alienated the members of the royal court and the leaders of the army. He especially angered the elite palace guards by murdering their commander. Recognizing a golden opportunity to seize the throne, another son of Artaxerxes I, Ochos, who served as the governor of Hyrcania (Old Persian: Varkana; modern-day Gorgan), on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea, raised an army, marched against his brother, and defeated Sogdianos. In his campaign against Sogdianos, Ochos enjoyed the support of Arshama, the Persian governor of Egypt and the head of the palace cavalry. Sogdianos was put to death after only six and half months on the throne. Ochos then ascended the throne as Darius II and ruled

from 423 to 404 BCE.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius II; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire

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Teispes

Teispes (Old Persian: Chishpish) was the king of the small kingdom of Anshan in the southern Fars province of Iran sometime in the late seventh century BCE. He was also the great-grandfather of Cyrus II the Great (r. 558–530 BCE), founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. On his clay cylinder unearthed in Babylon, Cyrus the Great stated that he was the son of Kambujiya (Cambyses), a grandson of Kurush (Cyrus I), and a great-grandson of Chishpish (Teispes). Cyrus also claimed that his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all kings of Anshan. In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) identified Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) as his father, Arshama (Arsames) as his grandfather, Ariyaramna (Ariaramnes) as his great-grandfather, Chishpish (Teispes) as his great-great-grandfather, and Hakhamanish (Achaemenes) as the founder of the Achaemenid royal house. He also claimed that there were eight kings in his family before he ascended the throne. Some scholars have questioned the validity of Darius's lineage, especially when it claims direct descent from Teispes. They maintain that Teispes was added to Darius's lineage to convert Darius into a close relative of Cyrus the Great and his son Cambyses, whose death in 522 BCE allowed Darius to stage a military coup and seize power.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cambyses I; Cyrus II the Great; Darius I

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Vishtaspa (Father of Darius I)

Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) was the name of several important figures in the history of ancient Iran. One of these was the father of Darius I, the Persian Achaemenid monarch who ruled from 522 to 486 BCE. In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, Darius I identified Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) as his father, Arshama (Arsames) as his grandfather, Ariyaramna (Ariaramnes) as his great-grandfather, Chishpish (Teispes) as his great-great-grandfather, and Hakhamanish (Achaemenes) as the founder of the Achaemenid royal house. In the same inscription Darius stated that at the time he ascended the throne, his father was in Parthia (Old Persian: Parthava), the region corresponding with present-day northeastern Iran and parts of southern Turkmenistan.

When Darius I seized the Achaemenid throne, rebellions erupted throughout the empire. The rebels in Parthia joined the Median leader Fravartish (Phraortes), whose revolt was based in Media in western Iran. With support from army units that had remained loyal to him, Vishtaspa attacked the Parthian rebels and defeated them. This was not a total victory, however, because Darius was forced to send additional troops to his father, who used them to attack the rebels once again. This time the rebels were pacified, and Parthia was secured for Darius. The account presented by the Greek author Herodotus contradicts Darius's inscription at Bisotun. Herodotus claimed that when Darius and six Persian officers plotted to seize power, Darius's father was not the governor of Parthia but rather the governor of Persis (Parsa) in southern Iran.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Achaemenes; Arsames; Darius I; Teispes

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Xerxes I

Xerxes was a king of the Persian Achaemenid Empire who ruled from 486 to 465 BCE. He was the son of the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) and Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus the Great. Xerxes was designated heir apparent over his older brother, Artabazanes. Before the death of his father, Xerxes served as the viceroy of Babylon. In an inscription at Persepolis in southern Iran, Xerxes introduced himself in the following manner: "My father was Darius; Darius's father was Hystaspes by name; Hystaspes's father was Arsames. …

Other sons of Darius there were, [but] … Darius my father made me the greatest after himself. When my father Darius went away from the throne, by the will of Ahuramazda I became king on my father's throne" (Kent: 149–150). The first challenge confronting Xerxes was a rebellion in Egypt, which the new king suppressed. The next target was Babylon, which had also revolted against the authority of the Persian state. Here, as in Egypt, the revolt was quickly put down.

In the sixth year of his reign, Xerxes embarked on a campaign against Greece. The exact reasons for the decision to invade Greece are unclear, since the country did not offer attractive economic and financial gains for the rich and powerful Achaemenid Empire. It has been suggested that a large group of prowar Athenian exiles at his court as well as his cousin and brother-in-law, Mardonius, may have encouraged Xerxes to exact revenge for the defeat that Darius I had suffered at Marathon. The Persian king raised an army and invaded mainland Greece in 480 BCE. After crossing the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, the Persian army seized Thessaly, Macedonia, and northern Greece. Athens was divided between those who advocated negotiations with the Persian king and those who favored a confrontation. The prowar party triumphed and formed a league under the leadership of Sparta, which tried to halt the Persian advance at a mountain pass called Thermopylae. Despite their dogged and courageous resistance, the Persians defeated the small Spartan force defending the pass and advanced on Athens, which was seized with little resistance. The confrontation between the Persian army and a small band of Athenian fighters, however, resulted in the burning and destruction of temples and homes on the Acropolis by the Persians. The next confrontation between the Persians and the Greeks took place at Salamis, where the Greek fleet destroyed the Persian naval forces.

In their accounts, Greek authors such as Herodotus celebrated the courage and self-sacrifice of the Spartans at Thermopylae and the victory at Salamis as momentous events in their history. Some in the West have also celebrated the Persian defeat as a unique and extraordinary event and a turning point in the history of Western civilization.

Xerxes did not remain in Greece. He returned to Asia and left an army under the command of Mardonius in Greece. In 479 BCE, a year after Xerxes had departed mainland Greece, the Persians were back on the offensive, attacking Attica, the region that contained the city of Athens. The Greeks managed to raise an army, which fought the Persians in an indecisive battle near Palatea in 479 BCE. Mardonius made the fatal mistake of participating in the fighting. The Persian commander was killed on the battlefield, and his army was forced to

withdraw. The Greeks scored a victory against a Persian force under the command of Tigranes near Mount Mycale on the coast of Asia Minor. From these setbacks the Persians learned that a military attack on mainland Greece only unified the Greek city-states, which would otherwise be fighting among themselves. A much wiser strategy was to utilize diplomatic alliances and the enormous financial power of the Persian state to encourage backbiting, squabbling, and internal strife among various Greek states, which would then be forced to seek Persian support in their struggle against one another.

In 465 Xerxes was killed by Artabanus, a Hyrcanian who enjoyed the confidence of the king and served as the captain of the royal guard. Artabanus organized the assassination plot with the support and assistance of Mithridates, the eunuch "who was the king's chamberlain and enjoyed his supreme confidence" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XI.69.1–6). After murdering Xerxes, Artabanus told the king's second son, Artaxerxes, that his older brother Darius had killed their father. Artaxerxes, who trusted Artabanus, killed his brother to avenge the murder of his father. After Artaxerxes had ascended the throne, Artabanus planned to assassinate the new king and seize the throne, but the Persian king discovered the plot and killed Artabanus.

Rock-cut tomb of Xerxes I, the Persian king of kings, at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in southern Iran. In the writings of Greek historians, including Herodotus, Xerxes appears as the Persian monarch who assembled the ancient world's largest army to invade Greece, but this son and successor of Darius I was also celebrated for sponsoring numerous building projects throughout his vast empire. (Christiaan Triebert)

The tomb of Xerxes I is located in Naqsh-e Rostam, a short distance from Persepolis in the southern Iranian province of Fars. Xerxes I left his successor a vast empire. According to his inscription at Persepolis, his empire incorporated "Media [western Iran], Elam [southwestern Iran], Arachosia [Qandahar in southern Afghanistan], Armenia, Drangiana [eastern Iran], Parthia [northeastern Iran], Aria [northwestern Afghanistan], Bactria [northern Afghanistan], Sogdiana [north of Bactria, Tajikistan/eastern Uzbekistan], Chorasmia [south of the Aral Sea/northwestern Uzbekistan and northern Turkmenistan], Babylonia [southern Iraq], Assyria [northern Iraq], Sattagydia [northern Pakistan], Sardis [western Turkey], Egypt, Ionians those

who dwell by the sea [Aegean Sea] and those who dwell across the sea, men of Maka [southeastern Iran], Arabia, Gandara/Gandhara [Upper Indus River Valley], Sind [in present-day southeastern Pakistan], Cappadocia [central Turkey], Dahae, Amyrgian Scythians [Central Asia], Pointed-Cap Scythians [Central Asia], Skudra, men of Akaufaka, Libyans [North Africa], Carians [southwestern Turkey], Ethiopians" (Kent: 150–151).

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes I; Darius I; Primary Documents: Document 14

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Xerxes II

A king of the Achaemenid Persian Empire who ruled from 424 and 423 BCE. Xerxes II was the oldest son of the Achaemenid monarch Artaxerxes I. After the death of his father in 424 BCE, Xerxes ascended the throne. Forty-five days after he had assumed the reins of power, his brother Sogdianos revolted and killed Xerxes II and proclaimed himself the king. The actions of Sogdianos while on the throne quickly alienated the members of the royal court and the leaders of the army. He especially angered the elite palace guards by murdering their commander. Recognizing a golden opportunity to seize the throne, another son of Artaxerxes I, Ochos, who served as the governor of Hyrcania on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea, raised an army, marched against his brother, and defeated Sogdianos. In his campaign against Sogdianos, Ochos enjoyed the support of Arshama, the Persian governor of Egypt and the head of the palace cavalry. Sogdianos was put to death after only six and a half months on the throne. Ochos then ascended the throne as Darius II and ruled from

423 to 404 BCE.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes I; Darius II; *Ancient Provinces:* Sogdiana

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Kings and Queens of the Arsacid/ Parthian Dynasty

OVERVIEW ESSAY

The Arsacid or Parthian dynasty was the longest-ruling royal house of pre-Islamic Iran. The longest entries in this chapter cover the life and career of Arsaces I, the founder of the dynasty, as well as the reigns and accomplishments of Mithridates I, Phraates II, and Mithridates II, who transformed the Arsacid state from a kingdom confined to present-day northeastern Iran and southern Turkmenistan to a vast empire and a world power, which at the height of its power ruled a territory stretching from Central Asia in the east to Syria in the west. The abbreviated nature of the entries for other Arsacid monarchs reflects the fundamental fact that the history of Greater Iran during the long Arsacid period suffers from a paucity of reliable documents and written sources.

The Arsacid dynasty hailed from the Scythian groups who roamed the vast plains of Central Asia. At a yet undetermined date these groups moved into Transoxiana, a region lying between two great rivers, the Oxus (Persian: Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (Persian: Syr Darya). From here the Arsacids later moved on to the region east of the Caspian Sea. They then pushed southward and settled in the region that today corresponds with southern Turkmenistan and the western part of the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan.

The entries on Arsaces I and his two immediate successors, Arsaces II and Priapatius, focus on the origins of the Arsacid dynasty and how early Arsacid kings struggled to maintain the independence of their fledgling kingdom against the threats posed by the neighboring Seleucid Empire, which ruled much of Iran and Mesopotamia after 305 BCE. The entries for Phraates I, Mithridates I, Phraates II, and Mithridates II focus on the growth and expansion of the Arsacid dynasty and how these four dynamic and charismatic Arsacid kings broke out of the isolation of northeastern Iran, defeated the local tribes, and eventually fought against and expelled Seleucid rule from

Iran. The Arsacid monarch Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE) recognized the growing decline of the Seleucid state, which was reflected in its defeat at the hands of the Romans. In 190 BCE the armies of Rome and its allies defeated the Seleucid monarch, Antiochus III (r. 223–187 BCE), in the Battle of Magnesia in Asia Minor. In the aftermath of the battle, the Seleucid king was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE. According to the terms of this treaty, Antiochus III renounced all his claims to territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send to Rome a group of hostages, including his own son, the future Antiochus IV; to pay a heavy war indemnity; and to surrender his fleet and elephants. Sensing the growing weakness of the Seleucid state based in faraway Syria, Phraates I embarked on a campaign to break out of northeastern Iran and expand his territorial possessions to the regions south of the Alborz mountain range. He defeated the Mardi, a tribal group that inhabited the eastern region of the Alborz. He then settled the Mardi near Rhagae (present-day Ray, south of modern-day Tehran) in eastern Media, thus expanding the boundaries of the Arsacid state from northeastern Iran to the lands west of the Caspian Gates. The newly conquered territory provided the Arsacid king with a territorial base to attack central and western Iran.

Phraates I's brother and successor Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE) built on Phraates's military successes and expanded the territory of the Arsacid kingdom to present-day Afghanistan in the east and western and central Iran to the west. Mithridates I scored his first major victory against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in Bactria, in present-day northern Afghanistan. He then pushed west and seized Media in 148 or 147 BCE. The Arsacid armies used Media as an operational base to attack Mesopotamia and capture Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia by 141 BCE. Arsacid armies continued their military operations in southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia, defeating the Elymaeans in present-day southwestern Iran and seizing the important city of Susa, which had served for nearly two centuries as one of the capitals of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Mithridates crowned himself king in Seleucia, thus transferring the capital of his fledgling empire from Nisa in present-day southern Turkmenistan to Ctesiphon, south of today's Baghdad in southern Iraq. The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II (r. 145–141 BCE) to respond by raising an army and invading Mesopotamia and Iran. The campaigns of Demetrius II against Mithridates I proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarch, who was defeated and captured by an Arsacid army. The humiliated Demetrius was sent to Mithridates I, who received the Seleucid monarch with kindness and generosity. After the

defeat of the Seleucids, the Elymaeans, who had formed an alliance with Demetrius, paid a high price for their disloyalty when Parthian forces plundered their temples. Between 139 and 132 BCE, Parthian armies swept through southwestern Iran and southern Iraq, including the important city of Babylon. In the east, Mithridates I also extended the boundaries of his newfound empire, but the extent of these territorial gains is unclear.

Mithridates's son, Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE) inherited an empire from his father that it was threatened by enemies in the east as well as the west. Toward the end of Mithridates's reign, the eastern frontiers of the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire had been breached by an Indo-European people known as Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) in Chinese and as Tochari by Roman and Greek writers. The Yüeh-chih were pushed out of Central Asia and forced to seek new pasturelands for their animals. In 130 BCE, while Phraates II was quelling the threat posed by the invading nomadic groups in the east, the Seleucid king Antiochus VII (r. 138–129 BCE) attacked and seized Babylonia, defeating Arsacid armies in three separate military encounters. With winter arriving, Antiochus divided his army and scattered its units in several cities in western Iran. The high-handed and oppressive attitude of these army units, who demanded food and supplies, caused the populace to revolt against Antiochus VII. Wishing to feel out his enemy, Phraates II sent an envoy to negotiate a potential peace agreement. Antiochus responded that he was willing to consider a peace treaty if the Arsacid monarch would release his brother Demetrius from captivity, withdraw from the provinces he had seized, and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord. Phraates rejected these demands. He also placed an army in the field. Against the advice of his officials, who pleaded with him to avoid a hasty foray, Antiochus VII marched against the Arsacids. When the two armies joined in battle, Phraates II defeated Antiochus, who was killed on the battlefield. The victory of Phraates II over Antiochus VII ended Seleucid rule in Iran. After his impressive victory over the Seleucids, Phraates II intended to advance to Syria. He was diverted to the east, however, by the renewed threat posed by nomadic groups who had breached the eastern frontiers of his empire. In 128 BCE, accompanied by Greek prisoners whom he had captured in his battle against Antiochus, Phraates attacked the invaders from Central Asia. As the battle was joined, the Greek prisoners of war, who were supposedly fighting for Phraates, defected to the enemy, causing chaos among the Parthian forces. In the midst of the confusion and mayhem that followed, Phraates II was killed on the battlefield.

The Arsacid Empire reached the zenith of its power and emerged as one of the most powerful states in the world during the reign of

Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), one of the most dynamic and successful of all Arsacid kings. After imposing Arsacid rule over Babylonia and Characene, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, Mithridates II marched against Armenia. He defeated the Armenian king Artavasdes I and took his son Tigrenes as a hostage to the Arsacid court. In the east, Mithridates II imposed Arsacid rule over Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan, and he brought Sistan (i.e., Sakastan, "the land of the Sakas") under his control.

Mithridates II also helped introduce significant changes to the trade and commerce of the ancient world after he received an envoy of the Han Chinese emperor Wudi at the Arsacid court. At the end of his stay, the envoy returned to China accompanied by representatives of the Arsacid monarch, who brought along such royal gifts as ostrich eggs and court magicians. These initial contacts and subsequent negotiations were followed by the first trading caravans between China and the Arsacid Empire. The transcontinental highway, which came to be known in the 19th century as the Silk Road, established direct and unhindered commercial links between China, Central Asia, Iran, and Rome and heralded the exchange of goods, ideas, and technology between East Asia, Central Asia, the Near East, and Europe.

In 109 BCE, Mithridates II adopted the title "King of Kings." In 95 BCE when the Armenian king died, Mithridates installed Tigranes II, who had been raised in the Arsacid court, as the new ruler of Armenia. Mithridates II expanded Parthian territory in the west all the way to the Euphrates River, seizing the important city of Dura Europos in present-day eastern Syria. Having thus established himself as the eastern neighbor of Rome, Mithridates II sent an envoy to the Roman general Sulla to negotiate an alliance. As a result of these negotiations, the Euphrates River was established as the border between the two powers.

After the death of Mithridates II, the Arsacid Empire came under constant pressure in the east from the nomadic groups bursting out of Central Asia and in the west from an aggressive and expansionist Rome. The Greek geographer Strabo wrote that the Parthians at first had hoped for peace with the Romans but instead were forced to defend themselves, first against Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae and then against the Roman general Mark Antony. The relationship between the two empires remained tense. War and conflict between the Romans and the Parthians would continue intermittently until the fall of the Arsacid state in 224 CE.

The threat from Rome in the west was matched by a new menace to the east, namely the Kushans, who had carved a large and powerful empire stretching from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. The

Kushan Empire incorporated present-day Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, parts of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, all of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the entirety of northern India as well as parts of eastern and central India. By bringing much of Central Asia under their control, the Kushans benefited enormously from the lucrative trade on the Silk Road while at the same time establishing direct commercial links with China. The Kushan monarch Kanishka also established close diplomatic ties with Rome in an attempt to further isolate the Arsacids. His plan most probably was to divert the flow of precious goods, particularly silk from Iran, to ports on the Indian Ocean where ships carrying Chinese, Central Asian, and Indian goods could sail to Rome without any hindrance and intervention from a third party, such as the Arsacids.

Beginning in the second century CE, the Arsacid Empire entered a long period of decline. Repeated Roman invasions and internecine struggle among various contenders to the throne undermined the power and stability of the empire, but the Arsacid dynasty did not collapse as a result of Roman invasions. The end of the Arsacid Empire came with the rebellion of a Persian vassal, Ardashir, who ruled as the governor of the district of Istakhr in the province of Fars in southern Iran. Ardashir invaded neighboring provinces in southwestern and southeastern Iran. These military campaigns forced the Arsacid monarch Artabanus IV to confront his rebellious vassal on the battlefield. When the two armies joined battle in 224 CE, it was Ardashir who emerged triumphant. The Arsacid army suffered a humiliating defeat, in which it lost its leader on the battlefield. The death of Artabanus IV signaled the end of Arsacid rule and the beginning of the Sasanian era.

Arsaces I

Arsaces I (Arshak I) was the founder of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE), which at its zenith ruled a powerful empire extending from Central Asia to Syria. Arsaces I ruled from 247/238 to 217 BCE. The origins of the Arsacid dynasty and the events that led to the rise of Arsaces I are shrouded in mystery. The absence of reliable historical sources has forced scholars of ancient Iran to rely exclusively on the fragmented and scanty accounts of Greek and Roman writers, who exhibited considerable hostility and disdain toward the Parthians, portraying them as “treacherous, bellicose and arrogant barbarians with curious and distasteful customs” (Colledge: 13). The Roman historian Justin wrote that Arsaces, the founder of the dynasty, was a man of “tried valour, though of uncertain extraction”

who, “accustomed to live by robbery,” invaded Parthia “with a band of robbers, defeated and killed Andragoras [the governor of Parthia who had proclaimed his independence] … and seized the government of the whole country” (Justin: XLI.IV.2). Not long after, he made himself master of Hyrcania on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea (Justin: XLI.IV.2). Another Roman historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, claimed that Arsaces I was “a man of low birth” who had been a “brigand chief during his younger days, but since his ideals gradually changed for the better, by a series of brilliant exploits he rose to greater heights” (*Ammianus Marcellinus:* 23.6, 1–5). The Greek author Strabo stated that Arsaces was a Scythian chief who emerged as the leader of the Parni or Aparni, a branch of the Dahae or Daae confederacy, a nomadic group who lived along the Ochus (Strabo: 11.9.2). In his account of Alexander’s campaigns in Central Asia, the historian Arrian mentions the Dahae or Daae as a group living in close proximity to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in Central Asia (Arrian: 3.28). By 250 BCE the Parnis had established themselves on the shores of the Atrek River. A short time later in 247 BCE, Arsaces I was crowned as king in Asaac. This event marked the beginning of the Parthian era. The exact location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11).

The rise of Arsaces I corresponded with the growing decline of the Seleucid state, which had ruled Iran since 305 BCE. The incessant military campaigns against the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt exhausted the Seleucid treasury and diverted the attention of its rulers from the distant eastern provinces of their empire. The city of Antioch, which served as the capital of the Seleucid kings, was situated on the western borders of the empire and a long way away from Iran and Central Asia. Sometime between 250 and 239 BCE, two important rebellions erupted against the authority of the Seleucid state. Diodotus, the satrap of Bactria, and Andragoras, the governor of Parthia, revolted and proclaimed their independence. In 238 BCE, the Parni under the leadership of Arsaces I took advantage of the chaos in the eastern provinces of the Seleucid state and invaded and conquered Parthia. The self-proclaimed independent ruler of Parthia, Andragoras, was killed, and his small kingdom emerged as the new home and operational base for Arsaces I and his successors. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or as those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used when referring to them and their empire. A short time after the conquest of Parthia, Arsaces seized Hyrcania (Justin: XLI.4). The acquisition of Parthia and Hyrcania allowed Arsaces to raise a large army to defend

himself against attacks from the Seleucids to the west and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom to the east. After Theodotus I, the founder of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, died, Arsaces I made peace and entered into an alliance with his son, Theodotus II (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE) invaded eastern Iran to punish the Parthians, Arsaces I scored a victory against the Seleucid monarch, a momentous milestone that the Parthians would observe "with great solemnity as the commencement of their liberty" (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II was forced to return west to quell disturbances, Arsaces I used the respite as an opportunity to lay the foundation of the Parthian government, "levy soldiers, fortify castles, and secure the fidelity of his cities" (Justin: XLI.5.1). He built a city called "Dara," which was designed and built in such a way that it did not need a "garrison to defend it and so fertile was the adjacent soil, that it was abundantly furnished with all necessaries, by its own riches" (Justin: XLI.5.1–2). There were also so much woods and so many fountains "that there was never any scarcity of water and it had a vast store of game" (Justin: XLI.5). Having "at once acquired and established a kingdom," Arsaces I died "in a good old age" circa 217 BCE (Justin: XLI.5). He was succeeded by his son, Arsaces II. Under his successors, beginning with the capable Arsacid monarchs Phraates I and his brother, Mithridates I, who was proclaimed king in 171 BCE, Arsaces's small kingdom broke out of northeastern Iran and gradually emerged as a major power. The significance of Arsaces I as the founder of a vast and powerful empire persisted. Out of respect and admiration for his accomplishments, all Arsacid monarchs after him assumed the title "Arsaces" upon ascending the throne. Strabo wrote that it is the custom of the Parthians that all their rulers are called Arsaces, "although personally one king is called Orodes, another Phraates, and another something else" (Strabo: 7.63).

See also: *Cultures:* Aparni; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Primary Documents: Document 21

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Arsaces II

We know very little about the early history of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE). What we know about the first four rulers of the Arsacid state is fraught with uncertainty and confusion because of the absence of reliable historical information. Traditional historical accounts maintained that upon the death of the dynasty's founder, Arsaces I, his brother, Tiridates I, succeeded him on the Arsacid throne and ruled until 211 BCE. In the wake of discovery of new coinage and other artifacts, a more recent and revised account, however, has surfaced. These findings have led some scholars to conclude that Arsaces II was the son of Arsaces I, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty. Arsaces II ascended the throne after the death of his father in 217 BCE and ruled until 191 BCE.

In 209 BCE, the Seleucid king Antiochus III embarked on his eastern campaign and marched to Iran to reimpose his authority over Parthia and Bactria. One of the principal goals of this campaign was to neutralize the threat posed by the newly emerging Arsacid state, which had established itself in present-day northeastern Iran during the reign of Arsaces II's father, Arsaces I. Arsaces I had conquered Parthia in 238 BCE. From Parthia, he had attacked and seized Hyrcania. To reimpose his authority over eastern Iran, the Seleucid monarch Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE) attacked Parthia and Hyrcania, but he failed to destroy the Arsacid state.

When the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III attacked eastern Iran in 209 BCE, he first captured Hecatompylos (City of a Hundred Gates) in Shahr-e Qumis, near the city of Damghan in present-day northern Iran, before marching to Hyrcania. Arsaces II fought the Seleucid army, estimated at 100,000 men and 20,000 horses, "with great bravery," but he eventually made a tactical retreat and "made an alliance" with Antiochus (Justin: XLI.5). Antiochus III also "found it prudent to make peace and a treaty of alliance" with the Arsacids (Debevoise: 18). Thus, the Arsacid dynasty survived. Upon his death, Arsaces II was succeeded by his son Priapatius, who ruled from 191 to 176 BCE. Beginning in the reign of Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE), a grandson of Arsaces II, the Arsacid state broke out of northeastern Iran and began to expand its territory into the regions south of the Alborz mountain range. Another grandson of Arsaces II, Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), converted the Arsacid kingdom into a major world power.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Priapatius; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Artabanus I

Artabanus I (Ardavan I) was a monarch of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty. There is, however, no agreement on the exact dates of his reign. One group of historians maintains that he ascended the Arsacid throne after the death of his father, Tiridates, in 211 BCE. A second group of scholars believes that Artabanus I was the Parthian king who ascended the throne after the death of his nephew Phraates II on the battlefield in 130 BCE.

Our knowledge of the early history of the Arsacid dynasty (r.

247/238 BCE–224 CE) is limited to a few unreliable accounts. What we know about the first four rulers of the Arsacid state is fraught with uncertainty and confusion because of the absence of reliable sources. Therefore, a great variety of opinion exists among scholars regarding the identity of the early Arsacid kings. One group of scholars has maintained that Artabanus I was the third king of the Arsacid state and ascended the throne in 211 BCE after the death of his father, Tiridates I, who was the brother of Arsaces I, the founder of the dynasty. According to these scholars, Artabanus I was forced to defend his kingdom against Antiochus III when the Seleucid king embarked on his eastern campaign in 209 BCE. The military objective of this campaign was to neutralize the threat posed by the emerging Arsacid kingdom as well as the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in present-day northern Afghanistan. Antiochus intended to punish the Parthians for extending their territory to the region south of the Alborz mountain range in northern Iran. Antiochus managed to occupy Hecatompylos or Sad Darvazeh (City of a Hundred Gates) in Shahr-e Qumis near present-day Damghan in northern Iran. The Parthians made a tactical retreat and acknowledged Seleucid sovereignty.

Aside from the Parthians, Antiochus also attempted to destroy the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in present-day northern Afghanistan. As with the Parthians, this campaign also resulted in limited success. A Seleucid army failed to capture Bactria, and in return for accepting the nominal sovereignty of the Seleucid king, the ruler, Euthydemus, was allowed to retain his position and title. In late 190 BCE, Antiochus and his army of 70,000 suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of 30,000 Romans. In the Treaty of Apamea signed in 188 BCE, Antiochus renounced his claims to all territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in Asia Minor. He also agreed to send a group of hostages, including his son, the future Antiochus IV, to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity to the Romans; and surrender his fleet and elephants (Appian: 11.8.38–40). With the defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. The defeat at Magnesia undermined the credibility of the Seleucids and convinced the pretenders to power in the east, particularly the Arsacids based in northeastern Iran and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in northern Afghanistan, to resume their campaigns of territorial expansion. Meanwhile, Artabanus I had died in 191 BCE and was succeeded by his son Priapatius.

This account has been rejected by more recent scholarship, which maintains that the next two successors to Arsaces I, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, were not his brother Tiridates I followed by his nephew, Artabanus I. Instead, they assert that both Tiridates I and Artabanus I are legendary, and the first historical Arsacid monarch by

the name of Artabanus is Artabanus, the son of the third Arsacid king, Priapatius, who had been previously identified as Artabanus II. According to these scholars, after the death of Priapatius, his oldest son, Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE), succeeded him, and after the death of Phraates I, his younger brother, Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), ascended the Arsacid throne. As one of the most brilliant of all Arsacid kings, Mithridates I transformed the Arsacid state from a small kingdom in northeastern Iran to a vast and powerful empire, seizing Media in western Iran as well as southwestern Iran and parts of southern Mesopotamia, including the city of Seleucia-on-Tigris. After the death of Mithridates I, his son Phraates II ascended the throne. Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE) defeated and killed the Seleucid monarch Antiochus VII on the battlefield in 129 BCE, putting an end to Seleucid rule in Iran. Phraates II was, however, killed in a battle against nomadic groups from Central Asia who had invaded the eastern frontiers of the Arsacid state. Upon the death of Phraates II, his uncle, Artabanus I, ascended the Arsacid throne. Therefore, according to this narrative Artabanus I was a son of the third Arsacid monarch, Priapatius, and a brother of Phraates I and Mithridates I.

Because of the continuing threat posed by invading nomadic groups, namely the Scythians of Central Asia, Artabanus I spent much of his reign in military campaigns against them. His preoccupation with the nomadic invaders in the east allowed the vassals of the Arsacid state in the southwestern provinces of the newly established empire to break away and declare their independence. Thus, a certain Hyspaosines, who ruled the small kingdom of Characene or Mesene in present-day Kuwait and southern Iraq, seized Babylonia in either 128 or 127 BCE. Artabanus never managed to recover these territorial losses, because in a battle against nomadic groups from Central Asia sometime between 124 and 123 BCE "he received a wound in his arm, of which he died immediately" (Justin: XLII.II.1). He was succeeded on the throne by his son, Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), whose conquests and many achievements gained him the title "the Great" (Justin: XLII.II.1).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; Mithridates II; Phraates II; Priapatius; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Artabanus II

Artabanus II (Ardavan II) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty from 10/11 to 38 CE. He ascended the throne after a revolt erupted against the reigning Arsacid monarch Vonones. The Roman historian Tacitus attributed the revolt against Vonones to the disdain that the Parthian nobility felt toward a king who had adopted Roman habits, customs, and manners. Vonones was denounced as a foreigner who was far more Roman than Parthian.

According to Tacitus, Vonones "had been given as a hostage to Augustus" by his father Phraates IV (Tacitus: 45). Although he had repeatedly defeated Roman armies, "Phraates had shown to Augustus every token of reverence and had sent him some of his children," not because he was frightened or intimidated by Roman power but rather "to cement the friendship" between Rome and Parthia (Tacitus: 45). After the death of Phraates IV, a civil war erupted among the various contenders to the Arsacid throne. To end the bloodshed, the Parthian nobility sent envoys to Rome and requested that Vonones return to Parthia and assume the reins of power. The Roman emperor Tiberius "thought this a great honor to himself, and loaded Vonones with wealth" (Tacitus: 45). However, the Arsacid nobles began to doubt their decision when they realized that the prince they had selected had been infected with the culture and habits of the Roman enemy: "Where, they asked, was the glory of the men who slew Crassus, who drove out Antonius, if Caesar's drudge, after an endurance of so many years' slavery, were to rule over Parthians" (Tacitus: 45). Vonones himself "further provoked their disdain, by his contrast with their ancestral manners, by his rare indulgence in the chase, by his feeble interest in horses, by the litter in which he was carried whenever he made a progress through their cities, and by his contemptuous dislike

of their national festivities" (Tacitus: 45). The Arsacid nobles "also ridiculed" the "Greek attendants" of Vonones and his habit of "keeping under seal the commonest household articles" (Tacitus: 45–46). They therefore decided to summon Artabanus, "an Arsacid by blood, who had grown to manhood among the Dahae," from whom the Arsacid dynasty had hailed (Tacitus: 46). In his first attempt to seize the throne, Artabanus and his army were routed. However, in their second encounter Artabanus rallied his forces and emerged as the victor. In 7 or 8 CE, Artabanus ascended the throne in the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon near present-day Baghdad in southern Iraq. The defeated Vonones fled to Armenia, "then a free country, and exposed to the power of Parthia and Rome, without being trusted by either" (Tacitus: 46).

Coin of the Parthian/Arsacid king of kings Artabanus II (Ardavan II). By incorporating the local royal houses of Media Atropatene, Mesene-Characene, Persis, and Elymais into his empire, Artabanus II brought all of the Iranian Plateau and the Tigris-Euphrates valley under Parthian/Arsacid rule. (Tom Cockrem/Getty Images)

Scholars of ancient Iran have debated about the extent of historical knowledge held by the Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties regarding their predecessors, particularly the Achaemenids. For example, did the Parthian and Sasanian kings know about Cyrus II the Great? And if they knew about them, what was or what were the sources of their knowledge? And how accurate was their understanding of the events that had transpired several centuries before they seized the reins of power? In his *Annals of Imperial Rome,* Tacitus wrote that the Arsacid monarch Artabanus II was fully aware of the accomplishments of

Cyrus II the Great and Alexander the Macedon and of the boundaries of their empires:

> He [Artabanus II] was elated by the wars which he had successfully waged against surrounding nations, while he disdained the aged and, as he thought, unwarlike Tiberius, eagerly coveting Armenia, over which, on the death of Artaxias, he placed Arsaces, his eldest son. He further added insult, and sent envoys to reclaim the treasures left by Vonones in Syria and Cilicia. Then too he insisted on the ancient boundaries of Persia and Macedonia, and intimated, with a vainglorious threat, that he meant to seize on the country possessed by Cyrus and afterwards by Alexander. (Tacitus: 183)

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vonones I; Vologeses I; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Artabanus III

Artabanus III was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who most probably ruled from 79 to 81 CE. Our information about this Arsacid king is scanty to the extreme. Artabanus was one of the sons of the Arsacid king Vologeses I, who ruled from 51 to 76/80. He was also the

brother of Pacorus (r. 77/78–108/109). The two brothers fought over the Arsacid throne either from 79 to 81 or from 80 to 81 (Sellwood: 233).

After the Roman emperor Nero committed suicide in 68 CE, several Nero impostors appeared. One of these pseudo-Neros appeared during the reign of Emperor Titus (r. 79–81 CE). The name of this impostor, who was a Roman citizen from Asia Minor, was Terentius Maximus (Debevoise: 214). When the impostor who had advanced as far as the Euphrates was forced to flee, he sought refuge with Artabanus III. The Arsacid monarch agreed to provide Terentius Maximus with military support so he could seize the reins of power in Rome. The plan, however, fizzled when the true identity of the impostor was discovered (Debevoise: 214; Cassius Dio: LXVI.19.3b).

On his coins, which were either minted in Seleucia or Ecbatana, Artabanus III is depicted as a king with straight hair and either a rectangular or long square-cut beard. The monarch wears an earring on his left ear and a diadem with a loop at the top. On the reverse side of his coins a beardless archer is seated on a throne. The archer has a bow in his right hand. On the reverse of one of his coins, a seated king is shown receiving a diadem from Tyche. There are no coins of Artabanus III after 81 CE. Based on this fact, scholars have concluded that in the struggle for power between the brothers Pacorus and Artabanus III, the former triumphed and the latter was most probably vanquished.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Pacorus; Vologeses II

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Artabanus IV

Artabanus IV (Ardavan IV) was the last king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty, who probably ruled from 213 to 224 CE. His death on the battlefield signaled the end of the Parthian Empire. Artabanus IV was the son of the Arsacid king Vologeses V (r. 191/192–207/208 CE). After the death of Vologeses V, his oldest son ascended the Arsacid throne as Vologeses VI (r. 207/208–221/222). Sometime after Vologeses had been proclaimed king, his younger brother, Artabanus, revolted and declared himself the legitimate heir to the Arsacid throne. The war between the two brothers dragged on for several years. The Romans took advantage of the civil war among the Parthian contenders to the throne to invade Mesopotamia. Eventually, Artabanus defeated his brother and ascended the Arsacid throne. Because of the scarcity of Parthian sources, it is not clear exactly when and how Artabanus seized the reins of power. We do know, however, that in 216 CE, the Roman emperor Caracalla (r. 211–217) asked Artabanus IV for the hand of his daughter in marriage. This fact has led historians of the Arsacid dynasty to conclude that Artabanus had already ascended the Parthian throne by 216 CE, although the coins minted with the face of Vologeses VI continued to appear in Seleucia until at least 221/222 CE. Artabanus turned down Caracalla's request and refused to allow his daughter to become a wife of the Roman emperor. Caracalla, who according to ancient sources was obsessed with his love for military glory, used the rebuff from Artabanus as a convenient pretext to invade Parthian territory. Roman forces under the command of Caracalla marched through northern Mesopotamia and captured the capital of the kingdom of Adiabene, the city of Arbela in present-day northern Iraq. The Romans could not, however, maintain their territorial gains and eventually withdrew without scoring a major military victory over Parthian forces. In response to Caracalla's invasion of Parthian territory, beginning in the spring of 217 Artabanus IV organized a military campaign aimed at reimposing Arsacid rule over Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, the situation in Rome had dramatically changed. Macrinus, the commander of the imperial guard who had become exasperated with the erratic and unpredictable decisions of his emperor, assassinated Caracalla just as he was about to embark on his second Parthian campaign. Artabanus used the arrival of a new emperor in Rome to demand the withdrawal of all Roman forces from Mesopotamia and financial compensation for the damages and destruction the Romans had brought about in their most recent campaign. When Macrinus rejected these demands, the war ensued yet once again.

In 217 CE, Artabanus IV attacked northern Mesopotamia. The

decisive battle was fought at Nisibis in today's southeastern Turkey, where the Parthians scored an impressive victory. The defeat forced the Romans to sue for peace. Shortly after this impressive victory, however, Artabanus IV was challenged by Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr, a small vassal kingdom in the province of Fars in present-day southern Iran. Using first the civil war between Vologeses VI and his younger brother Artabanus and then the wars between the Arsacids and the Romans, Ardashir expanded his territorial possessions from Fars into present-day southwestern Iran, seizing the province of Khuzestan. He also pushed eastward and seized Kerman in southeastern Iran. These conquests allowed Ardashir to declare himself an independent king. To demonstrate his independence, Ardashir minted his own coins. Artabanus IV seems initially not to have taken this challenge from a vassal very seriously. As Ardashir seized more territory and imposed his rule over neighboring kings, however, Artabanus IV had no choice but to respond. In April 224 when the two armies joined battle, Ardashir defeated and killed Artabanus IV. Cassius Dio wrote that Artaxerxes (Ardashir) conquered the Parthians in three battles, killing their king Artabanus (Cassius Dio: LXXX.23.2). Ardashir celebrated his momentous victory over Artabanus IV on a rock relief in Firuzabad in the province of Fars. With the death of Artabanus IV, Arsacid rule came to an abrupt end. Ardashir ascended the throne as the *shahanshah* (king of kings) and the founder of the new Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). Soon all the provinces of the Parthian Empire were brought under the authority of the new Sasanian dynasty, which unlike the Arsacids established a highly centralized political system and, in sharp contrast to the Parthians, who displayed a high level of tolerance toward all religious communities, imposed Zoroastrianism as the state religion of their empire.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses V; Vologeses VI; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Gotarzes I

Arsacid monarch who ruled the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire from 91/90 to 81/80 BCE. A rock relief at Bisotun near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran depicts the Arsacid king of kings Mithridates II and four of his high officials. A Greek inscription identifies one of these dignitaries as Gotarzes (Godarz), satrap of satraps, most probably the same Godarz who is believed by some scholars to have raised the flag of rebellion in Babylon and proclaimed himself the king in the last years of Mithridates's reign (Bivar: 41). Tablets "from Babylon dated c. 90 BC and after suddenly begin to name a king Gotarzes," which is believed to be Gotarzes I (Colledge: 34). After the death of Mithridates II in 88 or 87 BCE, it seems that Gotarzes was the sole ruler of the Arsacid Empire. The death of Mithridates II, however, ignited chaos and anarchy. Tigranes, the king of Armenia, attacked and captured northern Mesopotamia. Gotarzes himself was overthrown by an Arsacid contender, Orodes, in either 81 or 80 BCE.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates II; Orodes I

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Gotarzes II

A king of the Arsacid dynasty who ruled from 43/44 to 51 CE. He was the brother of the Arsacid monarch Vardanes. Gotarzes (Godarz) opposed his brother and revolted against Vardanes. Some scholars

believe that the two brothers ruled different parts of the Arsacid Empire, with one ruling Mesopotamia while the other controlled Media in western Iran (Sellwood: 204). When Vardanes was murdered, Godarz emerged as the sole ruler of the Arsacid Empire.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses I; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Mithridates I

Mithridates I (Mithradata I) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 171 to 139/138 BCE. He is generally viewed as the monarch who transformed the Arsacid state from a small kingdom in present-day northeastern Iran and southwestern Turkmenistan into a major empire that came to rule a vast territory extending from Central Asia to Mesopotamia. Mithridates was a son of the Arsacid monarch Priapatius (r. 191–176 BCE) and the brother of the Arsacid king Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE). After the death of Priapatius, Mithridates's older brother, Phraates I, ascended the Parthian throne and ruled from 176 to 171 BCE (Justin: XLI.5). Phraates I began the slow process of breaking out of the geographical confines of northeastern Iran, extending the territory of the Parthian state to the regions lying to the south of the Alborz mountain range. The Arsacids defeated the Mardi, a tribal group who lived in the eastern regions of the Alborz, and expanded the boundaries of their state from northeastern Iran to the lands west of the Caspian Gates.

When Phraates I died, he was succeeded by his brother, Mithridates I. Building on his brother's military success, Mithridates embarked on an ambitious campaign to expand the territory of the Arsacid kingdom even farther. The exact dates of Mithridates's impressive conquests are uncertain. However, it seems that his first

major victory was achieved against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in Bactria, in present-day northern Afghanistan. According to Justin, at almost the same time that Mithridates I ascended the throne of Parthia, Eucratides, the last important ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, began his reign (Justin: XLI.6.1). When war erupted between the two kingdoms, the Parthians emerged victorious and took away "the satrapy Turiva and that of Aspionus" (Strabo: 11.11.2). Mithridates I then pushed west and conquered Media in 148 or 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia by 141 BCE. Before he could complete his conquest of Mesopotamia, however, Mithridates I was forced to shift his focus to the eastern borders of his kingdom, which had been breached by invading nomadic groups from Central Asia. In the absence of their king, Parthian armies continued their military operations in southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia, defeating the Elymaeans in present-day southwestern Iran and seizing the important city of Susa, which had served for nearly two centuries as the capital of the Achaemenid Empire. According to "a cuneiform text it is also known that by 12 October 141, Mithridates' power was recognized as far afield as the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia" (Schippmann: The Arsacid Dynasty). Shortly before this Mithridates had himself crowned king in Seleucia, it is therefore possible "that the Parthian capital was transferred from Nisa in present-day Turkmenistan to Ctesiphon south of today's Baghdad in southern Iraq as early as his reign" (Schippmann: The Arsacid Dynasty). The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by attacking Mesopotamia and Iran. By this time, however, the power and prestige of the Seleucid state had suffered significantly as a result of continuous campaigns against the Ptolemaic state in Egypt, the humiliating defeat it had suffered at the hands of Rome and its allies in 190 BCE, and the Treaty of Apamea, which it had been forced to sign in 188 BCE. The campaigns of Demetrius II against Mithridates I proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarch, who was defeated and captured by a Parthian army in 139 BCE. The humiliated Demetrius was sent to Mithridates I in Hyrcania (modern-day Gorgan) in northern Iran. Mithridates treated the defeated Seleucid king "with a generosity becoming a king" (Justin: XVIII.9.1–2). Mithridates also arranged for a marriage between Demetrius and his daughter Rhodogune (Justin: XVIII.9.1–2). Despite these gestures of hospitality, Demetrius, who was anxious to return to Syria and regain his throne, tried to escape captivity twice, but on both occasions he was captured and sent back to Hyrcania. After the defeat of the Seleucids, the Elymaeans, who had formed an alliance with Demetrius, paid a high price for their disloyalty when

Parthian forces plundered their temples. Between 139 and 132 BCE, Parthian armies swept through southwestern Iran and southern Iraq, including the important city of Babylon. In the east Mithridates I also extended the boundaries of his newly found empire, but the extent of these territorial gains is unclear. According to classical sources, the conquests of the Arsacid monarch brought Parthian armies to the mouth of the Indus River in Sind in present-day Pakistan, while at least one scholar has expressed serious doubt that "the power of Mithridates extended so far into the kingdom of the Greco-Bactrian kings" (Bivar: 35). After a long and successful reign of 43 to 44 years, Mithridates I, who had assumed the title "great king," died in either 139 or 138 BCE and was succeeded by his son Phraates II.

Several authors of the classical era praised Mithridates I and his achievements in glowing language. For example, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus praised him for pursuing "a policy of clemency and humanity," which won him "an automatic stream of advantages and further enlarged his kingdom" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIII.18). He wrote that though Mithridates I had achieved "such heights of royal power, he did not cultivate luxury or arrogance, the usual accompaniments of power, but prided himself on the exercise of equity towards those who accepted his rule and courage towards those who opposed him" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIII.18). In short, "having made himself master over many peoples," Mithridates "taught the Parthians the best of the customs practiced by each" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIII.18).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Phraates I; Phraates II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Primary Documents: Document 22

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Mithridates II

Mithridates II (Mithradata II) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 124/123 to 88/87 BCE. He is generally viewed by scholars of ancient Iran as one of the most dynamic and successful of all the Arsacid kings. During his reign, the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) emerged as one of the most powerful states in the world. Mithridates II was the son of the Arsacid king Artabanus I (r. 128–124/123 BCE), the nephew of the Arsacid monarchs Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE) and Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), and the cousin of the Arsacid ruler Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE).

Silver coin of the Arsacid/Parthian king of kings Mithridates II. Celebrated as one of the most accomplished rulers of the Arsacid/Parthian dynasty, Mithridates II recovered the eastern provinces of his empire from Saka tribes, seized Armenia, and concluded the first peace treaty between the Parthian state and Rome. (DeAgostini/ Getty Images)

Mithridates II began his rule by re-establishing Arsacid rule over Babylonia and Characene, also known as Mesene or Meshan, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, corresponding with the territory of present-day southern Iraq and Kuwait. The Arsacid king then moved against Armenia. He defeated the Armenian monarch Artavasdes I and took his son Tigrenes as a hostage to the Arsacid court. In the east, Mithridates II imposed Parthian rule over Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan, and he brought Sistan (i.e., Sakastan, “the land of the Sakas”) under his suzerainty. It was during the reign of Mithridates II that an envoy of the Chinese emperor of the Han dynasty, Wudi, arrived at the Arsacid court. The envoy returned to China accompanied by representatives of the Arsacid monarch bearing

gifts of ostrich eggs and conjurers. These contacts and negotiations were followed by the first trading caravans between China and the Arsacid Empire.

Mithridates II also sent ambassadors to Rome to expand and augment this intercontinental trade route. The transcontinental highway, which came to be known in the 19th century as the Silk Road, created a direct commercial link between China, Central Asia, Iran, and Rome and heralded the exchange of goods, ideas, and technology between East Asia, Central Asia, the Near East, and Europe. Direct economic ties with China allowed plants, spices, foodstuffs, medicine, and musical instruments as well as new ideas and religious beliefs from India and Iran to travel eastward. Among the precious spices from Greater Iran introduced to China by way of the Silk Road was saffron, which "was used as an aromatic, to perfume clothes and hair and to flavour wines" (Wood: 81). The Chinese, who called the Arsacid dynasty Anshi or Anxi, also borrowed the cultivation of grapes for wine and the growing of alfalfa from the Farghaneh Valley in Central Asia. Farghaneh, which is divided today among the three countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, was famous for its horses, from among which the Chinese imported a particular breed. In return for exporting their horses to China, "the inhabitants of Farghaneh learnt from the Chinese the art of making silver and gold vessels and iron weapons" (Wood: 5). To the west, the Arsacids established a close trading relationship with Rome, importing various "metals and numerous manufactured articles of high class" and exporting "textile fabrics" such as "silks and carpets" as well as spices (Rawlinson: 425–426). The Arsacids also exported a variety of ointments to Rome. One of these, which the Arsacid kings used, was derived from several plants and spices, including saffron, and though very expensive, the ointment called "royal" was in high demand among the rich and powerful in Rome.

The greatness and power of Mithridates II was reflected in his adoption of the title "king of kings" beginning in 109 BCE. In 95 BCE when the Armenian king died, Mithridates installed Tigranes II, who had been raised in the Arsacid court, as the new ruler of Armenia. Shortly after, Mithridates forced the kingdoms of Adiabene, Gordyene, and Osrhoene to capitulate to Arsacid authority and accept his suzerainty. In the west, Mithridates expanded Parthian territory to the Euphrates. Having established himself as the eastern neighbor of Rome, Mithridates II sent an envoy, Orobazus, to the Roman general Sulla to negotiate an alliance. As a result of these negotiations, the Euphrates River was established as the border between the two powers. Orobazus was, however, condemned to death after his return to Iran for failing to uphold the status and eminence of his royal

master. Toward the end of his reign, a certain Arsacid prince by the name of Gotarzes (Godarz) may have challenged the authority of the Arsacid king of kings. After a long reign of approximately 36 years, Mithridates II died in either 88 or 87 BCE. During his reign, the Parthian Empire reached the zenith of its power and influence. This power and prosperity are reflected in the descriptions left by foreign travelers who visited the Arsacid domains. One Chinese traveler wrote that

> Anxi [Parthia] is situated several thousand *li* west of the region of the Great Yuezhi. The people are settled on the land, cultivating the fields and growing rice and wheat. They also make wine out of grapes. They have walled cities like the people of Dayuan [Farghana], the region containing several hundred cities of various sizes. The kingdom, which borders the Gui [Oxus River], is very large, measuring several thousand *li* square. Some of the inhabitants are merchants who travel by cart or boats to neighboring countries, sometimes journeying several thousand *li*. The coins of the country are made of silver and bear the face of the king. When the king dies, the currency is immediately changed and new coins issued with the face of his successor. The people keep records by writing horizontally on strips of leather. To the west lies Tiaozhi [Mesopotamia] and to the north Yancai and Lixuan [Hyrcania]. Tiaozhi is situated several thousand *li* west of Anxi [Parthia] and borders the western sea [the Persian Gulf]. It is hot and damp, and the people live by cultivating the fields and planting rice. In this region live great birds which lay eggs as large as pots. The people are very numerous and are ruled by many petty chiefs. The ruler of Anxi [Parthia] gives orders to these chiefs and regards them as his vassals. The people are very skillful at performing tricks that amaze the eye. (Sima Qian: 234–235)

Aside from his portrait on Arsacid coins, which depict him with a short beard and a diadem and at times with a long beard and a high domed tiara, a rock relief at Bisotun in western Iran shows Mithridates II and four of his high officials. A Greek inscription identifies one of these dignitaries as Gotarzes (Godarz), satrap of satraps, most probably the same Godarz who raised the flag of rebellion in Babylon and proclaimed himself the king in the last years of Mithridates's reign. Another high official is Kophasates (Kohzad), who is identified as "privy councilor" (Bivar: 41).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus I; Gotarzes I; Phraates II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Mithridates III

Mithridates III (Mithradata III) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who occupied the throne for a very short time in 58/57 BCE. Our knowledge of this Arsacid monarch is scanty to the extreme. Mithridates III was the son of the Arsacid monarch Phraates III (r. 71/70–58/57 BCE). Mithridates seized the Arsacid throne by killing Phraates III in 57 BCE. Mithridates overthrew his father with support from his brother, Orodes. The alliance between the two brothers, however, broke down quickly. After Mithridates III seized Seleucia and Babylon, Orodes raised an army and marched against his brother. When the two armies joined battle, Orodes defeated Mithridates, who was captured and subsequently executed.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Orodes II; Phraates III

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Orodes I

Orodes I (Urūd I) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 81/80 to 76/75 BCE. Our knowledge of this Arsacid monarch is scanty to the extreme. Toward the end of the reign of the Arsacid king Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), his authority was challenged by a Parthian prince by the name of Gotarzes (Godarz). On a rock relief at Bisotun near Kermanshah in western Iran, Mithridates II appears with four of his high officials. A Greek inscription identifies one of these dignitaries as Gotarzes, satrap of satraps, most probably the same Gotarzes who raised the flag of rebellion in Babylon and proclaimed himself king in the last years of Mithridates's reign (Bivar: 41). When Mithridates II died in either 88 or 87 BCE, Gotarzes ascended the throne as the new ruler of the Arsacid/Parthian Empire. Gotarzes ruled from 91/90 to 81/80 BCE. He was eventually challenged by Orodes, a son of Mithridates II who proclaimed himself as the legitimate successor to his father's throne. Orodes seized the throne sometime around 81 or 80 BCE and ruled for approximately 10 years.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Gotarzes I; Mithridates II; Sinatruces

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Orodes II

Orodes II (Urūd II) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 58/57 to 38 BCE. He was the son of the Arsacid monarch Phraates III. Orodes II supported his brother Mithridates III when the latter seized the Arsacid throne by killing their father in 57 BCE. Soon, however, the alliance between the two brothers broke down. Orodes attacked and defeated Mithridates, who was captured and executed.

The rise of Orodes II to power corresponded with the gradual collapse of the republican system in Rome and the emergence of a triumvirate: Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus. Crassus, who was appointed governor of Syria, intended to use his position in the east to invade the Parthian/Arsacid Empire. Dreaming of an easy and grand victory, Crassus raised an army in 55 BCE. In the spring of 54, the Roman general arrived in Syria and assumed the command of his army, estimated at 40,000 men. The bulk of the Roman army consisted of infantry. Orodes sent an envoy to Crassus in Syria to inquire about the reasons for the invasion. Crassus responded scornfully that he would explain the causes for his invasion after he had captured the Arsacid capital, Seleucia, on the Tigris. Hearing this response, the Parthian envoy pointed to the palm of his left hand and exclaimed, “Hair will grow here before you see Seleucia.” Orodes led the main Arsacid army to Media Atropatene (present-day Azerbaijan). He also ordered the young and talented general Surena to confront the invading Romans in Mesopotamia. Suren led his cavalry force of 10,000 men to northern Mesopotamia. In June 53 BCE in the Battle of Carrhae (ancient Harran near the present-day village of Altinbashak in southeastern Turkey on the country’s border with Syria), Suren scored an impressive victory, inflicting a humiliating defeat on Crassus and his Roman legions. Crassus and his son were killed, and a large number of Roman officers and soldiers were captured and executed. From a Roman force of 40,000 men, only 10,000 survived. The Roman battle standards were seized by Suren, and they were only returned to Rome after long negotiations during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus. The defeat at Carrhae “went down in Roman annals as one of the great disasters of Roman history” (Colledge: 43). The Arsacids had demonstrated their military might. The Euphrates River was recognized as the frontier between the two powers. The defeat at Carrhae ended the first triumvirate and ultimately resulted in a confrontation between Caesar and Pompey.

Tetradrachm of the Arsacid/Parthian king of kings Orodes II. It was during the reign of Orodes II that a Parthian army of 10,000 mounted archers under the command of Surena (Suren) inflicted a humiliating defeat on a much larger invading Roman army led by Marcus Licinius Crassus at Carrhae in northern Mesopotamia (present-day southeastern Turkey). (Christopher Gardner/Yale University Gallery of Art)

The impressive victory of Suren frightened Orodes, who ordered the murder of his general. Building on the victory at Carrhae, Orodes II sent his son Pacorus to ravage Syria in 51 BCE. The Arsacid prince was not, however, allowed sufficient time to complete his mission. Suspicious of his son's ambitions, Orodes called off the campaign and summoned him home in 50 BCE. In the ongoing conflict between Julius Caesar and Pompey, Orodes established contact with the latter and offered his support. It is not surprising therefore that after defeating Pompey, Caesar planned a major campaign to punish the Arsacids for interfering in the internal affairs of Rome and lending support to his nemesis. Caesar was, however, assassinated in 44 BCE, and the campaign against Orodes did not materialize. As the civil war

raged on among the Roman contenders, Orodes, who had reconciled with his son Pacorus, decided to take advantage of the prevailing chaos in Mesopotamia and resume his military campaign in Syria. Joined by the former Roman general Labienus, Pacorus led an Arsacid army to the conquest of Syria and parts of Asia Minor. The Jewish population in Palestine greeted the arrival of Parthian forces by offering them support. Soon, however, the fortunes of the war changed. First, Labienus was killed, and shortly afterward Pacorus also lost his life in an ambush in 39 or 38 BCE. According to Cassius Dio, after the death of Pacorus, Orodes "succumbed to age and to grief," but before he died the Arsacid king "delivered the government to Phraates, the eldest of his remaining sons" (Cassius Dio: XLIX.23.3). After ascending the throne, the ruthless Phraates IV first killed his father, Orodes, and then all his 30 brothers (Justin: XLII.5.1).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates III; Phraates III; Phraates IV; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Orodes III

King of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who probably ruled from 4 to 6 CE. In 20 BCE, the then Arsacid monarch, Phraates IV, recognized Rome's protectorate over Armenia and returned the legionary standards, which the Arsacids had captured from the Roman general Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE. In his attempt to convince

Phraates IV to return the Roman standards, the Roman emperor Augustus sent a female slave named Musa as a gift to the Arsacid monarch. Soon Musa emerged as the queen of Phraates IV. She used her influence over her husband to convince him to send his four sons as hostages to Rome and designate their son, Phraates (the future Phraates V), as the successor to the throne. In 2 BCE, Musa poisoned Phraates IV and placed herself and her own son, Phraates V, as joint rulers on the Arsacid throne. The Arsacid senate, which opposed the enormous power and influence of Musa, forced the former concubine and her son to abandon the throne. In their place, the Arsacid prince Orodes ascended the throne. Our knowledge about Orodes III and his reign is scanty to the extreme. After his death, Orodes III was succeeded by Vonones, a son of Phraates IV who had lived as a hostage for many years in Rome.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Phraates IV; Phraates V; Vonones I; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Pacorus

An Arsacid (Parthian) prince and the oldest son of the Arsacid monarch Orodes II. In 53 BCE, the Parthian commander Suren inflicted a humiliating defeat on a Roman army under the command of the Roman general Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae (Harran in present-day southeastern Turkey). Building on this impressive victory, Orodes II sent his son Pacorus to ravage Syria in 51 BCE. The Arsacid prince was not, however, allowed sufficient time to complete his mission. Suspicious of his son's ambitions, Orodes called off the campaign and summoned his son home in 50 BCE. Orodes, who was fully aware of the civil war between the two Roman generals, Julius Caesar and Pompey, tried to prolong the conflict among the Romans

by establishing contact with Pompey. As the civil war raged on among the Romans, Orodes, who had reconciled with his son Pacorus, decided to take advantage of the Roman civil war and resume his military campaign in Syria. Joined by the former Roman general Labienus, Pacorus led the Arsacid army in the conquest of Syria and parts of Asia Minor. The Jewish population in Palestine greeted the arrival of Parthian forces by offering them support. Soon, however, the fortunes of the war changed. First, Labienus was killed, and shortly afterward Pacorus also lost his life in an ambush in either 39 or 38 BCE. According to Cassius Dio, after the death of Pacorus, Orodes "succumbed to age and to grief," but before he died, the Arsacid king "delivered the government to Phraates, the eldest of his remaining sons" (Cassius Dio: XLIX.23.3). Justin wrote that after ascending the throne, the ruthless Phraates (Phraates IV) first killed his father, Orodes II, and then all of his 30 brothers (Justin: XLII.5.1).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Orodes II; Phraates IV; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Phraates I

Phraates I (Frahāta I) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 176 to 171 BCE. He was the oldest son of the third Arsacid monarch, Priapatius, who ruled from 191 to 176 BCE (Justin: XLI.V). Phraates ascended the Arsacid throne at a time when the power and prestige of the Seleucid state, which had ruled Iran since

305 BCE, was declining rapidly. In 190 BCE the armies of Rome and its allies defeated the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III in the Battle of Magnesia in Asia Minor. Antiochus was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE. According to the terms of this treaty, Antiochus III renounced all his claims to territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send to Rome a group of hostages, including his son, the future Antiochus IV, to pay a heavy war indemnity and to surrender his fleet and elephants. Recognizing the growing weakness of the Seleucid state, which was based in faraway in Syria (present-day southern Turkey), the Arsacid monarch Phraates I embarked on a campaign to break out of Parthia in northeastern Iran and expand his territorial possessions to the regions south of the Alborz mountain range. Phraates defeated the Mardi, a tribal group who inhabited the eastern region of the Alborz (Justin: XLI.V). He then settled the Mardi in Charax near Rhagae (south of modern-day Tehran) in eastern Media, thus expanding the boundaries of the Arsacid state from northeastern Iran to the lands west of the Caspian Gates. The newly conquered territory provided the Arsacid king with a territorial base from which to attack central and western Iran. Before he could continue his military campaigns, however, Phraates I died. Phraates I had several sons but designated his younger brother, Mithridates (Mithradata), as his successor.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; Priapatius; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Phraates II

Phraates II (Frahāta II) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 139/138 to 128 BCE. He was the son of the Arsacid

monarch Mithridates I, who ruled from 171 to 139/138 BCE. The nascent empire that Phraates inherited from his father was threatened by enemies in the east as well as the west. Toward the end of Mithridates's reign, the eastern borders of the Arsacid Empire had been breached by an Indo-European people known as Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) in Chinese and Tochari by Roman and Greek writers. The Yüeh-chih were pushed out of Central Asia and forced to seek new pastureland for their animals. In 130 BCE, while Phraates II was quelling the threat posed by the invading nomadic groups in the east, the Seleucid king Antiochus VII Sidetes (r. 138–129 BCE) attacked and seized Babylonia, defeating Arsacid armies in three separate military encounters. With winter arriving, Antiochus divided his army and scattered its units in several cities in western Iran. The high-handed and oppressive attitude of these army units, who demanded food and supplies, caused the populace to revolt against Antiochus VII (Justin: XXXVIII.10). Wishing "to feel out" his enemy, Phraates II sent an envoy to negotiate a peace agreement (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.14.15). Antiochus responded that he was willing to consider a peace treaty if the Arsacid monarch would release his brother Demetrius from captivity, withdraw from the provinces he had seized, and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.14.15). Phraates rejected these demands. He also placed an army in the field. Against the advice of his officials who pleaded with him to avoid a hasty foray, Antiochus VII marched against the much larger Arsacid force. When the two armies joined battle, Phraates II defeated Antiochus, who was killed on the battlefield (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.15.16). Though victorious against a formidable adversary, Phraates II organized a magnificent funeral for the fallen Seleucid monarch and sent his body to Syria in a silver casket. He also married the daughter of Demetrius II who had accompanied Antiochus VII to Iran (Justin: XXXVIII.10). The victory of Phraates II over Antiochus VII put an end to Seleucid rule in Iran. After his impressive victory over the Seleucids, Phraates II intended to advance to Syria. He was diverted to the east, however, by the renewed threat posed by nomadic groups who had breached the northeastern frontiers of his empire. In 128 BCE, accompanied by Greek prisoners whom he had captured in his battle against Antiochus, Phraates attacked the invaders from Central Asia. As the battle was joined, the Greek prisoners of war, who were supposedly fighting for Phraates, defected to the enemy, causing chaos among the Parthian forces (Justin: XLII.1). In the midst of the confusion and mayhem that followed, Phraates II was killed on the battlefield. He was succeeded by his uncle Artabanus I (Justin: XLII.2.1).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus I; Mithridates I; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus VII Sidetes; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Scythians; Primary Documents: Document 23

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Phraates III

An Arsacid (Parthian) king who ruled from 71/70 to 58/57 BCE. Phraates III (Frahāta III) was the son of the Arsacid monarch Sinatruces. During Phraates III's reign, the Romans expanded their territorial possessions in Asia Minor as they defeated and chased their nemesis, Mithridates of Pontus, who sought refuge with his son-in-law, Tigranes I, the ruler of Armenia. When Tigranes I requested support from Phraates III to defend his kingdom against the Roman general Lucullus, the Arsacid monarch refused to help. Instead, Phraates reached an agreement with Pompey, who secured the support of the Arsacid monarch by pledges of friendship and territorial concessions. Phraates used his pact with Pompey to consolidate his rule in Mesopotamia. Initially, Pompey did not oppose Arsacid control over Mesopotamia east of the Euphrates. He soon changed his position, however, and formed an alliance with King Tigranes of Armenia, who was promised Gordyene, which was already held by the Parthians. When Parthian forces were pushed out of Gordyene, Phraates protested, reminding the Romans that the Euphrates constituted the western boundary of his empire. Ignoring Phraates's repeated

objections, Pompey's forces crossed the Euphrates and raided Parthian-held positions as far east as the Tigris. The conflict was finally resolved when Phraates and Tigranes reached an agreement over their boundary dispute with assistance and support from Pompey. Phraates III was assassinated by his sons, Mithridates III and Orodes I. Mithridates was initially supported by his younger brother, Orodes. Orodes, however, revolted against Mithridates III, overthrowing his older brother, who was based in Media in western Iran. When Mithridates seized Seleucia and Babylon, Orodes attacked his brother. Mithridates was captured and executed.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates III; Orodes II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Phraates IV

Arsacid (Parthian) king who ruled from 38 to 32 BCE. Phraates IV (Frahāta IV) ascended the Arsacid throne after murdering his father and 30 brothers (Justin: XLII.5.1). In 53 BCE, a Parthian force under the command of Surena (Suren) inflicted a humiliating defeat on a large Roman army at Carrhae. Building on this impressive victory, Orodes II sent his son Pacorus to ravage Syria in 51 BCE. The Arsacid prince was not, however, allowed sufficient time to complete his mission. Suspicious of his son's ambitions, Orodes called off the campaign and summoned his son home in 50 BCE. Orodes, who was fully aware of the civil war between the two Roman generals, Julius Caesar and Pompey, tried to prolong the conflict among the Romans by establishing contact with Pompey. As the civil war raged on among the Romans, Orodes, who had reconciled with his son Pacorus, decided to take advantage of the Roman civil war and resume his military campaign in Syria. Joined by the former Roman general

Labienus, Pacorus led the Arsacid army to the conquest of Syria and parts of Asia Minor. Soon, however, the fortunes of the war changed. First, Labienus was killed, and shortly afterward Pacorus also lost his life in an ambush in either 39 or 38 BCE. According to Cassius Dio, after the death of Pacorus, Orodes "succumbed to age and to grief," but before he died, the Arsacid king "delivered the government to Phraates, the eldest of his remaining sons" (Cassius Dio: XLIX.23.3). Justin wrote that after ascending the throne, the ruthless Phraates IV first killed his father, Orodes II, and then all of his 30 brothers (Justin: XLII.5.1). The Arsacid monarch then unleashed his savage attacks against the Parthian nobility. These shocking assaults convinced "a large number of the most prominent persons" to abandon the Arsacid king and seek the protection of Rome (Cassius Dio: XLIX.23.3–5). Among those who fled was a noble named Monaeses, who sought refuge with the Romans. Monaeses "persuaded Mark Antony that he could direct the Roman army in Parthia, and that the Parthians as a whole were ready to rise against Phraates" (Colledge: 44). Convinced of the possibility of an easy victory, Antony prepared his army for an invasion of Parthian territory. He also demanded that the king of Armenia, Artavasdes, provide military and logistical support for the Roman army. In the spring of 36 BCE, a large Roman army crossed the Euphrates River and marched directly against Praaspa, the capital of Media Atropatene (present-day Azerbaijan). In hurrying to reach his destination, Antony divided his army and assigned two legions to protect the baggage train. The separation between the main army and the much slower moving baggage train provided a golden opportunity for the Parthians to strike. Targeting the baggage train, the Parthians waged repeated attacks, killing nearly 10,000 Romans, capturing a large number of Roman soldiers, and destroying the siege engines and the baggage train (Colledge: 44). As the Roman army began to suffer heavy casualties, the king of Armenia, Artavasdes, defected, abandoning Mark Antony and his legions, who were being repeatedly attacked by Parthian raiders. With winter arriving, Antony had no other option but to retreat. As the Roman legions marched to Armenia, Antony's losses increased. Thousands of Roman soldiers died either from thirst and starvation or at the hands of harassing Parthian archers. By the time he had arrived in Armenia, Antony had lost 35,000 of his men. This loss was even more devastating than the humiliating defeat suffered by Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE. As Antony and his legions returned to Syria, another 8,000 men were lost.

Silver coin of the Arsacid/Parthian king of kings Phraates IV. In 36 BCE, when the Roman general Mark Antony attacked Parthia, Phraates defeated the Romans and forced them to retreat with heavy losses. The Roman emperor Augustus made peace with Phraates IV and sent the Arsacid monarch an Italian concubine named Musa. Musa, who emerged later as a powerful queen at the Arsacid/Parthian court, poisoned Phraates IV and ruled the Parthian state jointly with her son, Phraates V. (Yale University Gallery of Art)

After spending the winter in Egypt in the company of the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, Antony returned to Armenia. Using Armenia as his operational base, he attacked Media in 33 BCE. Once again, however, this invasion proved inconclusive, and once again Antony was forced to retreat. As soon as the Romans had retreated, Phraates IV regained the territory he had lost. Shortly after these impressive victories, Phraates's rule was challenged by the Arsacid prince Tiridates, who revolted and forced Phraates to seek refuge with Scythian nomads. In 30 BCE, Phraates returned and forced Tiridates to flee to Syria (Cassius Dio: LI.18.2–3). As he fled, Tiridates took the son of Phraates

as a hostage with him. Tiridates also tried to gain the support of the Roman emperor Augustus in his effort to regain the Arsacid throne, but Augustus opted for a peace treaty with Phraates and returned the son of the Arsacid king to his father. In 20 BCE, Phraates recognized Rome's protectorate over Armenia and returned Rome's legionary standards, which the Arsacids had captured from the Roman general Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE. In return, Emperor Augustus sent a female slave named Musa to Phraates as a gift. Musa soon emerged as the queen of Phraates IV. She also advised Phraates in policy matters. Apparently upon her suggestion, Phraates sent four of his sons as hostages to Rome. Musa also bore her husband a son. In 2 BCE, Musa poisoned Phraates IV and placed herself and her son, Phraates, as joint rulers on the Arsacid throne.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Orodes II; Phraates V; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Phraates V

King of the Arsacid dynasty who ruled from 2 BCE to 2 CE. Phraates V (Frahāta V) was the son of the Arsacid monarch Phraates IV and his concubine, Musa, who had been sent to the Arsacid court by the Roman emperor Augustus. In 2 BCE, Musa poisoned her husband and placed herself and her son Phraates as joint rulers on the Arsacid throne. During the reign of Phraates V, control over Armenia and Mesopotamia continued to be the principal cause of conflict between

the Parthian and Roman Empires. When the Roman emperor Augustus sent his adopted son, Gaius Caesar, at the head of an army to invade Mesopotamia and Armenia, Phraates V sent an envoy to demand the return of his brothers, who had been sent to Rome by his father, Phraates IV, as a condition of signing a peace agreement. Augustus responded by sending him an insulting letter in which he addressed the Arsacid monarch as simply "Phraates." The Roman emperor demanded of Phraates to "lay aside the royal name and to withdraw from Armenia" (Cassius Dio: LV.20). Far from being intimidated, Phraates V wrote back "in a generally haughty tone, styling himself 'King of Kings' and addressing Augustus simply as 'Caesar'" (Cassius Dio: LV.20). In the end Phraates V agreed to a peace agreement, which was concluded in 1 CE. As a result, Armenia was declared a Roman protectorate. Shortly after signing the peace treaty with Rome, Phraates V and his mother, Musa, were overthrown and subsequently executed.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Phraates IV; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Priapatius

Priapatius was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) who ruled from 191 to 176 BCE (Justin: XLI.V). As with many monarchs of the Arsacid dynasty, we know very little about the reign of Priapatius. Priapatius was most probably the son of Arsaces II, the second dynast of the Arsacid royal house and a grandson of Arsaces I, the founder of the dynasty. He most likely ruled for 15 years and died in 176 BCE. Priapatius was the father of three Arsacid kings:

Phraates I, who ruled from 176 to 171 BCE; Mithridates I, who ruled from 171 to 139/138 BCE; and Artabanus I, who ruled from 128 to 124/123 BCE. After his death in 176 BCE, Priapatius was succeeded by his oldest son, Phraates I.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces II; Artabanus I; Mithridates I; Phraates I

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Sinatruces

Sinatruces was an Arsacid (Parthian) monarch who ruled from 78/77 to 71/70 BCE. As with many other Arsacid monarchs, our knowledge about Sinatruces is scanty to the extreme. He is credited with reunifying the Arsacid Empire, which was on the verge of civil war and disintegration after the death of the Arsacid monarch Gotarzes (Godarz). The 80-year-old Arsacid prince Sinatruces, who had sought refuge with Scythian tribes, was designated as the best candidate to reconstitute the Arsacid Empire and restore peace and stability throughout the kingdom. At his death in 71 or 70 BCE, Sinatruces was succeeded by his son Phraates III.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Gotarzes I; Mithridates II; Phraates III; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Vologeses I

Arsacid king who ruled the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire from 51 to 76/80 CE. A son of the Arsacid monarch Vonones, Vologeses I (Valakhsh I) first served as the ruler of Media in western Iran and then as the king of the Arsacid state from 51 to 76 or 80 CE. Early in his reign, Vologeses I tried to install one of his brothers, Tiridates, as the king of Armenia. Because of their lack of military preparedness, the Romans initially accepted the arrangement but later reneged and refused to support Tiridates. As the Romans began to organize a campaign against the Arsacids, a rebellion erupted against Vologeses I around 55 or 54 CE that could not be suppressed until around 58 CE. This revolt was led by an Arsacid prince, Vardanes, who hailed from Hyrcania in northern Iran.

Once he had freed himself from the rebellious prince, Vologeses managed to concentrate his forces against the Romans, who were defeated in 62 CE. This defeat did not, however, deter the Romans from raising another large army, which invaded Armenia in 63 CE. Recognizing the superiority of the Roman force, Vologeses I sued for peace. After long negotiations, the two powers reached an agreement. The Arsacid-backed prince, Tiridates, traveled to Rome, where he received his investiture as the ruler of Armenia from the Roman emperor, Nero. By accepting the nominal suzerainty of Rome over Armenia, the Arsacids imposed their candidate on the Armenian throne and retained their position as the true masters of Armenia.

The relationship with Rome remained peaceful during the reigns of Nero and his successor, Vespasian, although the Romans refused to provide any support for the Arsacid king when his empire was invaded by the Alans in 72 CE. Vologeses I died sometime between 76 and 80 CE.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses II; Vonones I; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Vologeses II

King of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled for a short time in 77/78 CE. Vologeses II was either the son or grandson of the Arsacid monarch Vologeses I. The history of the Arsacid dynasty after the death of Vologeses I is imprecise and confusing. Some historians of the Arsacid period have maintained that the passing of Vologeses I was followed by a civil war between a new Arsacid king, Pacorus II, and two princes of the Arsacid royal house, Vologeses II and a certain Osroes who was either a brother or brother-in-law of Pacorus II. According to these scholars, Vologeses II eventually managed to defeat Pacorus II and Osroes. However, other scholars of ancient Iran have repudiated this narrative, arguing that Vologeses II ascended the throne only in 105 or 106 CE. A third group of scholars have has argued that Vologeses II ruled the Arsacid throne from 128 to 147 CE, and yet a fourth scholar has asserted that Vologeses II ruled from 77/78 to 106/108 CE and that the king who ruled after 111 or 112 CE was most probably a new king, namely Vologeses III. The discrepancy and disagreement on the actual dates for the reign of Vologeses II emanate from a lack of reliable historical sources and the significant divergence among scholars regarding the interpretation of coins, the only dependable source for determining the dates for the reigns of several Arsacid monarchs. Regardless of these different interpretations, one fact is clear. In 114/115 CE, when the Roman emperor Trajan invaded Armenia and Iran, the ruler of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire was Osroes, not Vologeses II.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses I; Vologeses III; *Peoples:*

Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Vologeses III

A king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who most likely ruled from 111/112 to 147/148 CE. Little reliable information exists regarding the reign of Vologeses III. He began his rise to power by challenging Osroes (r. 108/109–127/128 CE), who was the ruler of the Arsacid Empire when the Roman emperor Trajan attacked Armenia and Mesopotamia in 113/114. In 127 or 128, Vologeses succeeded in removing Osroes. He was himself challenged, however, with a new pretender to the throne, Mithridates, who was eventually defeated. In 134 the nomadic Alans invaded from northern Caucasus, raiding Albania and Armenia as well as Media in western Iran and Cappadocia in Asia Minor. It took Vologeses nearly two years to expel the invading nomads. The conflict between the Arsacid state and Rome threatened to flare up yet again during the reign of the emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161 CE), this time over control of Armenia. The Romans imposed a new king on the Armenian throne, but in the end Vologeses did not oppose the move.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses II; Vologeses IV; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Vologeses IV

Arsacid (Parthian) king who probably ruled from 147/148 to 191/192. A son of Vologeses III, Vologeses IV ruled for nearly 40 years, one of the longest reigns among all Arsacid monarchs. His reign began with a campaign to invade Armenia, which was delayed because of warnings from the Romans, who reinforced their legions in Syria. Vologeses eventually invaded Armenia in 161 and installed an Arsacid prince on the Armenian throne. Parthian forces also attacked Syria and Cappadocia in Asia Minor, overrunning Roman positions and defeating Roman legions stationed in the region. In response, three Roman legions were moved from the Rhine and the Danube to the east. The Romans struck in 163. They seized Armenia and placed a new king on the Armenian throne. In 165 Roman legions invaded Mesopotamia, defeated the Parthian forces near Dura Europos in eastern Syria, and pushed toward Babylonia. As Roman forces approached southern Mesopotamia, Vologeses's allies and vassals defected and joined the enemy. Next, the Romans captured the important city of Seleucia-on-Tigris and a short time later sacked the Parthian capital, Ctesiphon, in present-day southern Iraq. To humiliate the Arsacid monarch, the Romans destroyed Vologeses's palace. Fortunately for the Arsacids, an outbreak of plague ravaged the Roman army, which was forced to retreat. As the Romans withdrew, Vologeses recovered some of the territories he had lost. In 166, however, the Romans attacked again and this time penetrated the Parthian territory as far east as Media, but they could not maintain their control over western Iran. When the war finally ended, the Romans had extended their rule over Dura Europos in eastern Syria. Vologeses IV died sometime in 191 or 192 and was succeeded by his son Vologeses V.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses III; Vologeses V; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Vologeses V

King of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 191/192 to 207/208 CE. He was the son of the Arsacid monarch Vologeses IV (r. 147/148–191/192 CE). Our knowledge regarding the reign of Vologeses V is scanty to the extreme. Vologeses revolted against his father and eventually succeeded him on the throne sometime in 191 or 192. When civil war erupted in the Roman Empire between Alexander Severus and Niger, who ruled the eastern provinces of the empire, Niger appealed to the Arsacid and Armenian kings for assistance and support. The king of Armenia refused to join Niger, but Vologeses V informed the Romans that "he would order his governors to collect troops—the customary practice whenever it was necessary to raise an army" (Herodian: III.i.2).

The civil war allowed Vologeses to intervene in Rome's internal affairs and recover some of the territory his father had lost during his long reign. Vologeses V invaded Mesopotamia and instigated rebellions in Adiabene and Osroene to reimpose Arsacid suzerainty over these former vassal states. Once the civil war ended in the Roman Empire with the victory of Septimius Severus, the Roman armies attacked Mesopotamia and reoccupied much of the territory they had lost. This Roman invasion was brief. Once the main Roman army returned west, Vologeses retook the territories he had lost in Mesopotamia and again imposed his control over Adiabene. In 198 CE, Septimius Severus attacked Mesopotamia for the second time. During this campaign, the Romans seized Nisibis (present-day Nusaybin in southeastern Turkey) and captured the Arsacid capital, Ctesiphon, which was looted by a Roman army. Seleucia-on-Tigris and Babylon were also sacked. Twice the Romans tried and failed to capture the important religious and commercial city of Hatra in present-day northern Iraq. The dogged and stubborn defenders of the city inflicted heavy casualties on the Roman forces. Suffering from a shortage of food in addition to heavy casualties, the Romans were forced to withdraw, but their invasion left the western provinces of

the Arsacid state devastated and in ruins. Vologeses V died in 207 or 208 and was succeeded by his son Vologeses VI.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Vologeses IV; Vologeses VI; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids

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Vologeses VI

Vologeses VI was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled from 207/208 CE to 221/222 CE. His father was the Arsacid monarch Vologeses V. A significant part of Vologeses VI's rule was spent fighting his younger brother Artabanus (Ardavan), who rose in rebellion against the throne in 213 CE. The war between the two brothers continued for several years as Roman armies invaded Mesopotamia and threatened the western provinces of the Arsacid Empire. Preoccupied with his brother's revolt, Vologeses VI tried to maintain a peaceful relationship with the Roman emperor Caracalla. Caracalla, however, tried to use the internal war between Vologeses and his brother to provoke a confrontation with the Arsacids and invade northern Mesopotamia and western Iran. Artabanus finally defeated his brother Vologeses around 216 CE and seized the Arsacid throne. Despite his defeat, Vologeses appears to have continued his fight to regain his throne until 221/222 CE, when the coins minted in his name cease.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus IV; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I

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Vonones I

Vonones I was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty who ruled for a short time in 8/9 CE. He was the eldest son of the Arsacid king Phraates IV. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, Vonones's father had given Vonones, along with several of his brothers, as a hostage to the Roman emperor Augustus. Although he had repeatedly defeated Roman armies, Phraates IV "had shown to Augustus every token of reverence and had sent him some of his children," not because he was frightened or intimidated by Roman power and might but "to cement the friendship" between Rome and Parthia. After the death of Phraates IV, a civil war erupted among the various contenders to the Arsacid throne. To end the bloodshed, the Parthian nobility sent envoys to Rome and requested that Vonones return to Iran and assume the reins of power. The Roman emperor Tiberius "thought this a great honor to himself, and loaded Vonones with wealth" (Tacitus: 45). However, the Parthian nobles began to doubt their decision when they realized that the prince had been "infected" with the ways and manners of the Roman enemy: "Where, they asked, was the glory of the men who slew Crassus, who drove out Antonius, if Caesar's drudge, after an endurance of so many years' slavery, were to rule over Parthians" (Tacitus: 45). Vonones himself "further provoked their disdain, by his contrast with their ancestral manners, by his rare indulgence in the chase, by his feeble interest in horses, by the litter in which he was carried whenever he made a progress through their cities, and by his contemptuous dislike of their national

festivities" (Tacitus: 45). The Parthian nobles "also ridiculed" the "Greek attendants" of Vonones and his habit of "keeping under seal the commonest household articles" (Tacitus: 45–46). They therefore decided to summon Artabanus, "an Arsacid by blood, who had grown to manhood among the Dahae" (Tacitus: 46). In his first attempt to seize the throne, Artabanus and his army were defeated. However, in his second encounter Artabanus "rallied his forces" and defeated Vonones (Tacitus: 46). Artabanus ascended the throne as Artabanus II in 10 or 11 CE at Ctesiphon, the Arsacid capital.

Silver coin of the Arsacid/Parthian king of kings Vonones I. Vonones I, who had lived as a hostage in Rome, returned to Parthia to assume the throne, but his foreign manners alienated the Parthian nobility who revolted and forced him out of power. (Yale University Gallery of Art)

The defeated Vonones fled to Armenia. Once he had arrived in Armenia, he proclaimed himself the king of the country. Artabanus II refused to accept Vonones as the new king of Armenia and tried to

install one of his own sons as the ruler of that country. The Roman emperor Tiberius, however, refused to accept Arsacid rule over Armenia and dispatched his own adopted son, Germanicus, to Armenia with the objective of installing a son of the ruler of Pontus as the new king of Armenia. Artabanus II was not prepared to confront the large Roman army and opted for a treaty that restored peace between Rome and Parthia. The Romans, who had no more use for Vonones, deported the ill-fated Arsacid prince to Cilicia, where he died in 19 CE as he was planning his escape.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus II; Phraates IV

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Kings and Queens of the Median Dynasty

OVERVIEW ESSAY

The Medes were an Iranian-speaking group who arrived in present-day western Iran at a thus far undetermined date. There they created the first empire of ancient Iran in the seventh century BCE. Evidence regarding the exact origins of the Medes and the political and administrative organization of their kingdom is scanty. Archaeological excavations at Median sites in western Iran, particularly those within the so-called Median triangle, which is bounded by the three cities of Hamedan, Kangavar, and Malayer, have produced valuable but nonetheless meager and inconclusive results. Assyrian inscriptions as well as Babylonian chronicles shed some light on isolated events and encounters between the Medes and their neighbors, particularly the Assyrians and the Babylonians, but they do not provide any clear outline of Median history, politics, and social organization. In his *Histories,* the Greek historian Herodotus provides a wealth of information about the Medes and the kings who established and expanded the Median Empire, but under closer scrutiny his narrative is found to be riddled with fictitious stories and legendary tales.

Herodotus claimed that the founder of the Median state was Deioces, who unified the Medes under his leadership. The Greek author also credited Deioces with the construction of Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) as the capital of the fledgling Median kingdom. Recent scholarship has questioned the accuracy of Herodotus's account, which most probably relied on oral and legendary sources. According to other sources, Deioces was not the founder and the first king of the Median kingdom. Neo-Assyrian texts, which have proved to be far more reliable than Herodotus, instead mention a certain Daiukku, and indeed a Mannaean governor named Daiukku is described on an Assyrian inscription dating back to 721–705 BCE. It is nonetheless impossible to confirm with any certainty that the Daiukku mentioned in the inscription and the Deioces

included in Herodotus's account are the same leader. As a result, an increasing number of scholars have concluded that either the king known as Deioces belonged to the realm of oral and legendary tradition or that he was in fact a king of Media but sometime after the reign of Phraates, whom Herodotus identifies as Deioces's son.

Regardless of the empire's uncertain origins, it seems that during the reign of the Median king, who appears as Umakishtar (Huvakhshtra) in Neo-Babylonian sources and as Cyaxares the grandson of Deioces in Herodutus's *Histories,* the Median kingdom emerged as a major power in the ancient Near East. Huvakhshtra reached an agreement with the Neo-Babylonian Empire and used this alliance to attack and destroy the Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE. The collapse of the Assyrian state signaled the rise of the Medes. They followed their victory against the Assyrians by annexing the kingdom of Urartu, which was centered around Lake Van in eastern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), as well as the land of the Mannaeans and the Scythian kingdom. The destruction of Urartu allowed the Medes to emerge as the dominant power in the eastern regions of Asia Minor and a neighbor to the powerful kingdom of Lydia. From 590 to 585 BCE, the two new neighbors fought several inconclusive battles. According to Herodotus, the king of Media, Cyaxares, and the ruler of Lydia, Alyattes, finally agreed to cease all hostilities and establish the Halys River (Kizil Irmak or Red River in present-day eastern Turkey) as the boundary between their two kingdoms. Their alliance would prove particularly fateful in the history of ancient Persia. To solidify the new peace treaty, the son of Cyaxares, Astyages, married a daughter of Alyattes. Shortly after this, Cyaxares died and was succeeded by his son Astyages, who appears in Herodotus's account as the last ruler of the Median Empire and the grandfather of Cyrus II the Great, founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire.

According to Herodotus, Astyages was the grandfather of Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire through his daughter, Mandane. Herodotus writes that Astyages had a prophetic dream that alarmed him enough that he arranged a marriage between Mandane and a Persian named Cambyses. After Mandane had been married to Cambyses for a year, Astyages had another prophetic dream foretelling that the Median monarch would be overthrown by his own grandson, the child of Mandane and Cambyses. To prevent such an outcome, Astyages recalled his daughter Mandane to the Median court and put her under strict watch. According to Herodotus, when Cyrus, Mandane's son, was born, Astyages ordered one of his ministers to murder the infant. The Median official, however, refused to carry out his royal master's order, and the child was eventually adopted and raised by the shepherd Mithridates. Years later Astyages, who did not

have a son of his own, met the young Cyrus and recognized him as his own grandson. Soon afterward the young prince succeeded Cambyses, his father, on the Persian throne. Seeing an opportunity, enemies of Astyages hatched a conspiracy to remove him from the Median throne and replace him with his grandson Cyrus. Today, many historians believe that Herodotus's account, which presents Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, as the grandson of Astyages and therefore a half-Median prince, is legendary. In the absence of reliable historical sources, the story told by Herodotus cannot be verified. Indeed, it is impossible to know the exact nature of the relationship between Astyages and Cyrus.

What is known is that the end of the Median Empire did come when Cyrus, now the ruler of Persia, revolted against Astyages. Like their exact relationship, the origins of their conflict remain a mystery. Herodotus claimed that Astyages summoned Cyrus to his court after learning that the Persians intended to revolt. Cyrus, however, responded by sending a threatening message to the Median king saying that he would indeed arrive in Media sooner than Astyages liked. Another source, however, writes that Cyrus initially was defeated in three different battles with the Medes, but he refused to despair and instead rallied his army into a fourth battle with the Medes at Pasargadae in present-day southern Iran. The Persians were defeated again and fled the battlefield, but when they saw their wives and children, they felt so ashamed that they decided to turn around and face the enemy, routing the Median army, which disintegrated. The Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle of Nabonidus* contradicts these Greek accounts and claims that the king of Media attacked Cyrus, but his army revolted against the king, delivering him as a prisoner to Cyrus. According to Herodotus, after his victory over the Median king Cyrus treated Astyages with kindness and compassion and allowed him to live at his court until he passed away.

Astyages

According to Herodotus, Astyages was the last king of the Median Empire. He most probably ruled from 584 to 550 BCE. Astyages was overthrown by his grandson Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid state who incorporated Media and its various vassal states into his own newly emerging empire. Herodotus stated that Astyages was the son of the Median king Cyaxares. Under Cyaxares, the Median state reached the apex of its power, transforming itself from a kingdom struggling for its survival against Scythians and Assyrians into a vast and powerful empire. The Medes

expelled the Scythians and soon after captured Nineveh, subduing the Assyrians (Herodotus: 1.106). The destruction of the Assyrian Empire allowed the Medes to emerge as a major political and military power and a neighbor of the powerful kingdom of Lydia. Between 590 and 585 BCE, the two new neighbors fought several inconclusive battles. In 585 BCE, the king of the Medes, Cyaxares, and the ruler of Lydia, Alyattes, finally agreed to cease all hostilities and establish the Halys River (Kizil Irmak or Red River in today's eastern Turkey) as the boundary between the two powers. To solidify the new peace treaty, the son of Cyaxares, Astyages, married a daughter of Alyattes. Shortly after this, the Median king died and was succeeded by his son, Astyages.

According to Herodotus, Astyages was the grandfather of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire through his daughter, Mandane. Herodotus writes that Astyages had dreamt one night that his daughter, Mandane, "urinated in such enormous quantities that it filled his city and swamped the whole of Asia" (Herodotus: 1.107). When the magi interpreted the meaning of the dream, Astyages was sufficiently alarmed to disallow his daughter to marry a Mede of noble rank. Instead, Astyages married his daughter to Cambyses, a Persian from a "good family, and quiet habits though he [Astyages] considered him [Cambyses] much below a Mede even of middle rank" (Herodotus: 1.107). But dreams kept on coming, haunting the Median king. After Mandane had been married to Cambyses for a year, Astyages had another dream in which "a vine grew out of his daughter's private parts and spread over Asia" (Herodotus: 1.108). When Astyages shared the dream with his dream interpreters, they told him that a son would be born from his daughter who would overthrow the king and seize the Median throne. To prevent such an outcome, Astyages recalled his daughter Mandane to the Median court and put her under strict watch. According to Herodotus, when the child (Cyrus) was born, Astyages asked his closest confidant, Harpagus, to kill the baby. Harpagus could not bring himself to murder an innocent child, so he passed the baby Cyrus to Mithridates, a shepherd whose wife had given birth to a stillborn. Instead of murdering Cyrus, Mithridates and his wife decided to adopt him and raise the child as their own. Some years later when the child had grown up to be a fine young boy, Astyages, who did not have a son of his own, met the young Cyrus and recognized him as his own grandson. Astyages decided to spare Cyrus's life, but he nonetheless punished his confidant Harpagus by ordering his men to kill his son, cook his body, and feed it to the boy's father. When Harpagus discovered what Astyages had done to his son, he did not display any emotions. The minister, however, refused to forgive his royal master

and awaited for an opportunity to exact his revenge. According to Herodotus, Harpagus established contact with Cyrus after the young prince had succeeded his father, Cambyses, on the throne of Persia and hatched a conspiracy to remove Astyages from the Median throne and replace him with Cyrus. In the absence of reliable historical sources, the story told by Herodotus cannot be verified. Indeed, it is impossible to know the exact nature of the relationship between Astyages and Cyrus.

The end of the Median Empire came when Cyrus, now the ruler of Persia, revolted against Astyages. According to Herodotus, Astyages summoned Cyrus to his court after he learned that the Persians intended to revolt and free themselves from the Median yoke. Cyrus, however, responded by sending a threatening message to the Median king that "he would be there a good deal sooner than Astyages liked" (Herodotus: 1.127). Plyaenus reported that Cyrus was defeated in three different battles with the Medes (Plyaenus: 7.6.1). Despite these setbacks, Cyrus rallied his men and led them into a fourth battle with the Medes at Pasargadae in present-day southern Iran near the city of Shiraz (Plyaenus: 7.6.1). The Persians were defeated again and fled the battlefield, but when they saw their wives and children, they were "ashamed of themselves and turned around to face the enemy," routing the Medes, "who were pursuing in disorder," and winning "so great a victory that Cyrus no longer needed another battle against them" (Plyaenus: 7.6.1). Another source, namely Ctesias, claims that after the conquest of the Median capital, Ecbatana, Astyages was captured while hiding in the attic or vaults of the royal palace together with his daughter Amytis and her husband Spitamas (*Ctesias' History of Persia:* 170). The Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle of Nabonidus* contradicts the Greek accounts and reports that the king of Media "marched against Cyrus, the king of Anshan," but his army "revolted against him" and delivered him "in fetters" to Cyrus, who attacked the Median capital and seized all the silver, gold, and other valuables of the country as booty and carried them off back to Anshan (Pritchard: 235). According to Herodotus, after his victory over the Median king, Cyrus treated Astyages with kindness and compassion and allowed him to live at his court until he passed away (Herodotus: 1.130).

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; *K&Q, Median:* Cyaxares/Huvakhshtra; *Peoples:* Media, Medes, and the Median Empire

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Cyaxares/Huvakhshtra

According to the Greek author Herodotus, Cyaxares was a king of the Median Empire. Herodotus portrayed Cyaxares as a brilliant diplomat, politician, and military commander who unified the Medes and unleashed their power against neighbors in all directions, converting the Median state from a small kingdom into a powerful empire. In Neo-Babylonian sources, the Median king who destroyed the Assyrian Empire is Huvakhshtra.

The death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE signaled the beginning of the end for the Assyrian kingdom. A fierce civil war erupted shortly after the passing of the Assyrian monarch. Local rulers who had been intimidated by the power of Assyria rose in rebellion and proclaimed their independence. In the midst of this turmoil, the Chaldaean general Nabopolassar emerged as the leader of the Babylonian revolt against Assyrian domination. By 626/625 BCE, he had established himself as the independent ruler of Babylon. Between 616 and 615 Assyria and Babylonia fought several wars, with the Babylonians targeting the allies of Assyria, particularly the Mannaean and Aramaean tribes, while the Assyrians, with military support from Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt, responded with their own offensive. In 615 BCE, Nabopolassar felt sufficiently confident to march against Ashur, the first capital of the Assyrian state and in political and economic importance second only to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Babylonians, however, failed to capture the city. Initially the closest ally of the Babylonians was Elam, but starting in 615, Media joined the campaign against Assyria. Before moving against Assyria, however, the Medes had to subdue the Scythians, who in the past had allied themselves with Assyria. Once the Scythian threat had been neutralized, the Medes were finally prepared to move against their old nemesis. But the destruction of the Assyrian kingdom required an alliance with the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

In the autumn of 615, the Medes crossed the Zagros Mountains and captured Arrapha (present-day Kirkuk in northeastern Iraq). Then in

the summer of 614 Huvakhshtra, the Median king, captured Tarbisu (modern-day Sherif Khan in northern Iraq) near Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. He then invaded and sacked Ashur. The Median army slaughtered the inhabitants of Ashur, destroyed their temples, and plundered their state treasures before razing the city to the ground. Those who survived the massacre were carried off as prisoners. The king of Babylonia, who had reached Ashur with his army after it had been seized and destroyed by the Medes, met with the Median monarch Huvakhshtra (Cyaxares?) outside the city, and the two kings concluded a treaty of peace and friendship.

The Assyrians responded to the destruction of Ashur by attacking Babylonia, but they failed to neutralize the threat posed by Nabopolassar and his army. In the summer of 612, the Babylonians and Medes joined forces and marched against the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. The Assyrian king Sennacherib had founded the city at the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the seventh century BCE. Nineveh's size and grandeur were unparalleled in the ancient world. Dominated by the high citadel at Kuyunjik and by a royal palace that towered above the city, Nineveh displayed the supreme power and prestige of Assyrian kings. The attack on Nineveh was coordinated by Nabopolassar and Huvakhshtra. After joining forces, the two kings marched upstream along the embankment of the Tigris and stormed the Assyrian capital. After a long siege and several fierce battles, they finally conquered the city. The victors plundered and destroyed Nineveh, massacring its population and carrying off into slavery those whose lives they spared.

The fall of Nineveh was a deathblow to the Assyrian state. The Assyrian king Sin-sharr-ishkun (r. 627–612 BCE) was most probably killed during the final assault, but parts of his army under the command of Ashuruballit (r. 612–609 BCE) escaped to Harran in upper Mesopotamia near the present-day village of Altinbashak in southeastern Turkey. Once in Harran, Ashuruballit sat on the throne as the king of Assyria. He intended to regroup his forces with assistance from Necho II, the pharaoh of Egypt. In 610 the Medes and the Babylonians, who were determined to prevent the resurgence of the Assyrian state, merged their forces again and marched against Ashuruballit, who abandoned Harran and retreated to Carchemish on the western bank of the Euphrates River on the present-day border between Turkey and Syria. But the Assyrians refused to accept defeat. In 609 BCE, with assistance from Egypt, Ashuruballit attacked Harran but failed to recapture the city after Nabopolassar arrived with his army to rescue the besieged garrison. Ashuruballit was most probably killed sometime during this campaign, because his name is not mentioned again. The remnants of the Assyrian army, with support

from Egypt, fought desperately to expel the enemy, but they were defeated for the last time in 605 BCE at Carchemish and Hamath in Syria. After three centuries of domination the Neo-Assyrian state ceased to exist, and its territory was divided between Babylonia and Media. The territory of the Assyrian state, which incorporated the three important Assyrian urban centers of Nineveh, Ashur, and Arbela, were divided between the Babylonian and Median Empires.

The fall of the Assyrian Empire signaled the rise of the Medes as a major power in the Near East. The Medes followed their victory against the Assyrians by annexing the kingdom of Urartu, which was centered around Lake Van in eastern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), as well as the land of the Mannaeans and the Scythian kingdom. The destruction of Urartu allowed the Medes to emerge as the dominant power in eastern Asia Minor and a neighbor to the powerful kingdom of Lydia. From 590 to 585 BCE, the two new neighbors fought several inconclusive battles. According to Herodotus, the king of Media, Cyaxares, and the ruler of Lydia, Alyattes, finally agreed to cease all hostilities and establish the Halys River (Kizil Irmak or Red River in present-day eastern Turkey) as the boundary between the two states. To solidify the new peace treaty, the son of Cyaxares, Astyages, married a daughter of Alyattes. Shortly after this, Cyaxares died and was succeeded by his son, who appears in Herodotus's account as Astyages, the last ruler of the Median Empire and the grandfather of Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; *K&Q, Median:* Astyages; Phraortes; *Peoples:* Media, Medes, and the Median Empire; Primary Documents: Document 4

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Deioces

According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Deioces (Old Iranian: Dahyuka) was the founder of the kingdom of Media in western Iran. Herodotus describes Deioces as a Median leader "of great ability and ambitions" who revolted against the authority of the Assyrian state in an attempt to free his people (Herodotus: 1.96). Herodotus claims that Deioces was the son of a Median by the name of Phraortes and named his own son Phraortes after his father. According to Herodotus, Deioces was therefore the grandfather of Cyaxares, the greatest of all Median kings, who conquered Nineveh and destroyed the Assyrian Empire. Herodotus portrays Deioces as a highly intelligent and shrewd leader who was troubled by the fragmentation and weakness of his people. Early in his career, Deioces built a solid reputation for himself as an honorable, fair-minded, and impartial judge. As his reputation as an enforcer of strict justice spread beyond his district, "everyone was glad to submit cases to his judgment, until he became the only person they would turn to" (Herodotus: 1.96–97). Because he had distinguished himself as a just and fair-minded arbiter and judge, when the Medes came to recognize the need for a government, they chose Deioces as their first king. Deioces used his newly acquired power to compel his people first to build a palace and then to build a capital city for their new ruler. Thus, Herodotus attributed the founding and construction of the Median capital Ecbatana (Old Persian: Hagmatana; New Persian: Hamedan) in present-day western Iran to Deioces. The Greek author described Ecbatana as a city "of great size and strength fortified by concentric walls," designed in such a way that "each successive circle was higher than the one below it by the height of the battlements" (Herodotus: 1.98). Once the construction of the new capital was completed, Deioces introduced his people, the Medes, to the ceremonies attendant to royalty: "admission to the king's presence was forbidden, and all communication had to be through messengers. Nobody was allowed to see the king, and it was an offence for anyone to laugh or spit in the royal presence" (Herodotus: 1.99). The Median king also consolidated his power by the "strict administration of justice" and the creation of a network of spies who "were busy watching and listening in every corner of his dominions" (Herodotus: 1.100). Having unified the various Median rural communities and townships under his authority, Deioces died after a long reign of 53 years (Herodotus: 1.101). He was succeeded by his son Phraortes (Old Persian: Fravartish), who had been named after his grandfather.

Recent scholarship has questioned the accuracy of Herodotus's account, which most probably relied on oral and legendary sources. Neo-Assyrian texts mention a certain Daiukku, and indeed a Mannaean governor named Deioces does appear on an Assyrian

inscription dating back to the reign of the Assyrian king Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE). It is nonetheless impossible to confirm with any certainty that the Daiukku of Sargon's time and the Deioces mentioned in Herodotus's account are the same leader (Schmitt: Deioces). As a result, an increasing number of scholars have concluded either that the king known as Deioces belonged to the realm of oral and legendary tradition or that he was in fact a king of Media, but he most probably ruled sometime after Phraortes and not prior to him.

See also: *K&Q, Median:* Astyages; Cyaxares/Huvakhshtra; Phraortes; *Peoples:* Media, Medes, and the Median Empire

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Mandane

According to the Greek historians Herodotus (Herodotus: 1.107.1) and Xenophon (Cyropaedia: 1.2.1), Mandane was the daughter of Astyages, the last ruler of Media and the mother of Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Herodotus wrote that Astyages had dreamt one night that Mandane "urinated in such enormous quantities that it filled his city and swamped the whole of Asia" (Herodotus: 1.107). When the magi interpreted the meaning of the dream, Astyages was sufficiently alarmed to disallow his daughter to marry a Mede of noble rank. Instead, Astyages married his daughter to Cambyses, a Persian from a "good family, and quiet habits though he [Astyages] considered him [Cambyses] much below a Mede even of middle rank" (Herodotus: 1.107). After Mandane had been married to Cambyses for a year, Astyages had another dream in which "a vine grew out of his daughter's private parts and spread over Asia" (Herodotus: 1.108). When Astyages shared the dream with his dream interpreters, they told him that a son would be born from his daughter who would overthrow the king and seize the Median throne. To prevent such an outcome, Astyages recalled Mandane to the Median

court and put her under strict watch. According to Herodotus, when the child (Cyrus) was born, Astyages asked his closest confidant, Harpagus, to kill the baby. Harpagus could not bring himself to murder an innocent child, so he passed the baby Cyrus to Mithridates, a shepherd whose wife had given birth to a stillborn. Instead of murdering Cyrus, Mithridates and his wife decided to adopt him and raise the child as their own. Several years later when the child was a full-grown boy, Astyages, who did not have a son of his own, met the young Cyrus and recognized him. When Cyrus's father, Cambyses, died, Cyrus ascended the throne of Anshan, which was a vassal kingdom of Media. As Astyages's dream had foretold, Cyrus revolted against his grandfather. After several fierce battles Cyrus defeated Astyages; seized the Median capital, Ecbatana; and incorporated Media into his emerging empire.

This account by Herodotus has been dismissed by many scholars as purely ahistorical and legendary. Some have also maintained that the story was invented to create a direct familial link between Astyages, the last king of Media, and Cyrus II, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire. The story allowed Cyrus to claim that his right to rule Media was not based exclusively on a military victory but also on his legitimate right to succeed his maternal grandfather.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cambyses I; Cyrus II the Great; *K&Q, Median:* Astyages

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Phraortes

According to the Greek author Herodotus, Phraortes (Old Persian: Fravartish) was the second monarch of the Median dynasty and the son of Deioces, who had united all Median tribes under his rule before his death. Unlike his father, however, Phraortes "was not content to be king only of Media" (Herodotus: 1:102). Having inherited a strong Median state from his father, he expanded the boundaries of his kingdom at the expense of the neighboring regions and kingdoms. The first country he conquered was Persia. The combined power of Media

and Persia allowed Phraortes to embark on the conquest of the ancient Near East. His territorial ambitions eventually brought him face-to-face with the military might of Assyria. In a battle against the kingdom of Assyria, Phraortes was defeated and killed together with many of his troops. The conquest and destruction of Assyria would be left to Phraortes's son and successor, Cyaxares. There is no agreement on the dates for Phraortes's reign. Some have argued that he ruled for 22 years, from 675 to 653 BCE, while others have maintained that his rule was considerably longer, extending from 678 to 625 BCE. The name of another Phraortes is mentioned in the inscription of the Achaemenid monarch Darius I in Bisotun in western Iran. Although not Phraortes, the former king of Media, the Phraortes mentioned in the Bisotun inscription is also Median. He is a Median rebel who revolted against the authority of Darius, claiming that he was Khshathrita of the family of Cyaxares, the former king of Media and the son of Phraortes (Kent: 123).

See also: *K&Q, Median:* Cyaxares/Huvakhshtra; Deioces; *Peoples:* Media, Medes, and the Median Empire

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Kings and Queens of the Sasanian Dynasty

OVERVIEW ESSAY

This chapter presents the reader with entries on the kings and queens of the Persian Sasanian dynasty, the last great Iranian royal house of the pre-Islamic era, which ruled from 224 to 651 CE. The longest entries in this chapter are devoted to the most prominent of Sasanian rulers, namely Ardashir I, founder of the dynasty; his son Shapur I, who fought and defeated three Roman emperors; Shapur II, the longest-reigning Persian monarch who scored several impressive victories against the Roman armies; Kavad I, who tried to reform the empire's archaic institutions and practices; Khosrow I, who has been identified by some Iranian and Muslim historians as the greatest of all Sasanian monarchs; Khosrow II, under whom the Sasanian Empire reached its greatest extent; and finally Yazdegerd III, whose murder signaled the end of the Sasanian dynasty.

The Sasanians seized the reins of power after Ardashir, governor of the district of Istakhr (Estakhr) in the Iranian province of Fars and a vassal of the Arsacids, defeated and killed the last Arsacid (Parthian) king, Artabanus IV, on the battlefield in 224 CE. After ascending the throne, Ardashir imposed his authority over the countries and provinces ruled by the Arsacids. In the east, Ardashir and his son, Shapur, forced into submission the Kushans, who ruled the territory of present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and parts of southern Central Asia. Ardashir then moved against Roman-held Mesopotamia, attacking Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey. The message to the old nemesis in the west was that in sharp contrast to the Arsacids who had adopted a defensive posture, the new Sasanian dynasty was determined to adopt a more aggressive stance toward Rome. Ardashir's son, Shapur I, built on his father's policy and fought three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. These campaigns culminated in the capture of Roman emperor Valerian by the Persian king in 260.

Ardashir I and Shapur I reorganized the administratively decentralized and politically fragmented empire they had inherited from the Arsacids and established an absolutist monarchy. Local rulers and vassals who disobeyed the Sasanian king of kings were replaced by members of the Sasanian royal family, usually the sons of the ruling monarch. The Sasanians did not, however, destroy the powerful landowning families who had enjoyed a close alliance with the Arsacid ruling family. These families retained their vast landholdings and special privileges, and as the power of the Sasanian central government declined, they began to play a central role in the daily political life of the Sasanian Empire.

The Sasanians also reversed the tolerant attitude of the Arsacids toward the religious communities of the empire and imposed Zoroastrianism as the state religion. Beginning in the reign of Bahram I (r. 273–276 CE), the members of non-Zoroastrian communities, including Jews, Christians, and Buddhists, were at times persecuted. The Iranian prophet Mani was also denounced and imprisoned, and his followers were either persecuted or forced to flee the Sasanian domains. The power of the Zoroastrian priesthood reached a new height when the Zoroastrian chief priest was granted the right to place the imperial crown on the head of the Sasanian monarch at coronation.

Throughout the reign of the Sasanian dynasty, the conflict with Rome flared up intermittently. The wars between Rome and Persia were centered on the control of Armenia and Mesopotamia. In sharp contrast to the Arsacids, the Sasanians were generally successful in their wars against Roman armies, scoring impressive victories on the battlefield. In 298, however, the Romans surprised the Sasanian monarch Narseh and defeated the Sasanian army in eastern Asia Minor. Narseh fled the battlefield to safety, but his queen, his sisters, and several of his children were seized by the Romans. As the Roman armies began to advance toward Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital, Narseh was forced to sue for peace. According to the peace agreement between the two powers, the Sasanian monarch ceded five provinces in Mesopotamia to the Romans. The pro-Roman ruler of Armenia was reinstated under Roman suzerainty. The Sasanian monarch also agreed to renounce his claims on Iberia (present-day Republic of Georgia) in the Caucasus, which emerged as a Roman protectorate. The Tigris River was established as the boundary between the two empires. Narseh never recovered from the defeat he had suffered at the hands of the Romans.

In response to these humiliating concessions, a grandson of Narseh who ascended the Sasanian throne as Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE) embarked on a systematic campaign to reverse the losses sustained

during the reign of his grandfather. Shapur II began his reign by organizing a campaign against Arab tribesmen who had invaded the southern and southwestern provinces of the Sasanian Empire, raiding cities, towns, and villages. He then shifted his focus to Central Asia, where a Hunnic people called the Chionites were threatening to invade the eastern provinces of the Sasanian state. After several military campaigns between 353 and 358, Shapur pacified the Chionites and formed an alliance with their king, who agreed to join the Persian monarch in his campaigns against the Romans.

Much of Shapur II's reign was spent in wars against Roman armies. For 27 years, Shapur II fought numerous battles against the Romans and emerged victorious from all of them. His considerable courage and perseverance would allow him by 363 to restore Persia to a higher status than that it had enjoyed under the rule of his grandfather, Narseh. Shapur II was determined to regain the five provinces of Mesopotamia that Narseh had lost to the Romans and had other reasons as well for his numerous campaigns to defeat the Romans. The Roman emperor Constantine had proclaimed Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. He had also appointed himself as the protector of all Christians in the world, including those living in the Sasanian domains. Additionally, the Romans were trying to interfere in the internal affairs of the Sasanian state and undermine Shapur's authority by supporting a Sasanian prince named Hormozd, who had sought refuge at the Roman court.

In military campaigns extending from 337 to 363, the Persian and Roman armies repeatedly fought over the control of Mesopotamia and Armenia. Despite heavy casualties, the Persians managed to capture the Roman-held Sanjara (Sinjar) in present-day northern Iraq and Amida (present-day Diyarbakir) in southeastern Turkey. The Romans struck back in 363, when the Roman emperor Julian marched at the head of a large army toward Mesopotamia. Accompanying Julian and his army was the pretender Persian prince Hormozd, who intended to replace Shapur II. Though he defeated a small Persian force outside the gates of Ctesiphon, Emperor Julian could not penetrate the defenses of the city. As Shapur and the Persian army approached Ctesiphon, Julian marched eastward to confront the Sasanian king in an open battle. Shapur avoided an open confrontation and instead resorted to surprise attacks waged by the Persian cavalry. In the Battle of Samara, fought between a unit of the Persian cavalry and Roman forces, Julian received a mortal wound and died three days later. The Romans had no choice but to sue for peace and agree to territorial concessions. Julian's successor, Jovian (r. 363–364 CE), signed a peace treaty, which returned to Shapur II the five provinces that his grandfather, Narseh, had lost to the Romans. The Romans also ceded

the strategic outposts of Nisibis and Sanjara and promised to cease their interference in the internal affairs of Armenia. Persian rule over Armenia was restored. As a direct consequence of these Persian victories, a large number of Roman prisoners of war, including many skilled craftsmen, builders, and engineers, were settled in the interior of the Sasanian Empire. Shapur II also settled a large number of Persians in the newly conquered cities, particularly in Nisibis, which served as an outpost against future Roman incursions.

In 303 the Armenian king Tiridates, who had allied himself with Rome, converted to Christianity. Then in 312, Emperor Constantine I converted to Christianity and began to promote his new faith as the state religion of the Roman Empire. In 330, Constantine transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium (later Constantinople) on the shores of the Bosporus. One of the reasons for moving the capital from Rome to Byzantium was the proximity of the new capital to the borders of the Sasanian state. Constantine proclaimed himself as the king of all Christians, including Christians living in the Sasanian territory. These developments convinced the Sasanian monarch Shapur II to view the Christians of the Sasanian Empire as the allies of his most formidable foe. These events also augmented Shapur's support for Zoroastrianism as the national religion of Persia. Despite the growing tension between the Sasanian state and its Christian community, the Persian Empire remained a religiously heterogeneous state containing significant non-Zoroastrian communities, including Jews, Christians, and Buddhists.

Although the Roman Empire remained the principal adversary of the Sasanian state, beginning in the fifth century CE a new threat emerged from Central Asia. The nomadic Kidarites and Hephthalites invaded the eastern provinces of the Sasanian state and forced the Sasanian monarchs Bahram V (r. 421–439 CE), Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE), and Peroz I (r. 459–484 CE) to spend much of their reigns on defending the eastern provinces of their empire. These efforts, however, failed to neutralize the threat posed by these nomadic invasions. In 484, the Hephthalites defeated and killed the Sasanian monarch Peroz on the battlefield. This victory over the Sasanian army and the death of the Persian king allowed the Hephthalites to invade eastern Iran, forcing the Sasanians to sue for peace and pay an annual tribute.

These defeats at the hands of the Hephthalites, combined with the growing dissatisfaction of the subject classes, particularly the peasant farmers, forced elements within the ruling elite to propose fundamental social and economic reforms. The Sasanian monarch Kavad I realized the need for institutional reforms that could curtail the power of the Persian nobility and the powerful Zoroastrian

priesthood. Not surprisingly, therefore, Kavad quickly became attracted to the teachings of Mazdak, a member of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy who preached against the greed, arrogance, and unrestrained power of the country's ruling classes. Mazdak believed that to create a just and peaceful society free of competition and violence, human beings had to abandon greed and selfishness and share the existing resources of their society, including private property and women.

Kavad's support for Mazdak's ideas posed a direct threat to the privileges of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious leadership, which came together to depose and imprison Kavad I in 496. After escaping his prison, Kavad sought refuge with the Hephthalites, among whom he had lived as a hostage after his father's defeat. In 499, Kavad raised an army with assistance and support from the Hephthalites. Once he had regained his throne, he tried to appease the anti-Mazdak courtiers and nobles. The Sasanian royal family was divided between pro-Mazdak and anti-Mazdak factions. Mazdak and his followers apparently favored the older son of Kavad, Kavus, as his father's successor. The opponents of Mazdak, both inside and outside the court, supported the younger prince, Khosrow, who was ultimately designated as the successor to his father. Khosrow suppressed the Mazdakite movement and executed Mazdak and many of his followers.

During the reign of Khosrow I (r. 531–579 CE) the Sasanian state introduced a series of important reforms, which were aimed at curtailing the power of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. They also were intended to increase the power of the Sasanian central government by increasing its size and strengthening the position of the Sasanian king of kings vis-à-vis the provincial power centers. The most important of these reforms was restructuring the tax-collection system. In the traditional system, taxes were levied on the yield of land. Therefore, from year to year the amount of the tax varied. Khosrow abolished the system based on yearly variation and replaced it with a fixed sum. The Sasanian monarch also reorganized the administrative structure of his empire. He created a governmental system based on a council of ministers headed by a chief minister. Khosrow also curtailed the influence of the powerful landowning families who frequently interfered in the decision-making process at the Sasanian court. The Sasanian army was another important institution reorganized by Khosrow. To centralize the decision-making process and bring it under his direct control, Khosrow abolished the post of the supreme commander in chief and replaced it with four commanders responsible for order and security in the eastern, western, northern, and southern regions of the empire.

Each commander reported directly to the Sasanian king. Khosrow I also appointed margraves, or commanders of the frontiers, who also received orders directly from their royal master.

During the reign of Khosrow's grandson Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz), the Sasanian Empire reached its greatest extent. Beginning in 603, Persian armies attacked and captured Roman-held fortresses and towns in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. In response to these Persian victories, the new Byzantine emperor, Heraclius (r. 610–641 CE), dispatched a delegation to the Persian court to sue for peace, but Khosrow II refused to negotiate a peace treaty and denounced Heraclius as an illegitimate ruler. The Persian armies went on the offensive again and reached the Mediterranean coast in 612. In 613, the Sasanian forces inflicted a humiliating defeat on a Byzantine force under the command of Heraclius. This victory allowed Khosrow to occupy Syria and Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem, where his forces seized the True Cross of Christian tradition and transported it back to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. To the north, a Sasanian army marched west from Cappadocia and quickly reached the Asian shores of the Bosporus in 614. Once again a Byzantine embassy arrived in the Persian court to negotiate a peace agreement, but Khosrow II rejected them.

In 618, Khosrow succeeded in his campaign to invade Egypt and captured the city of Alexandria in 619. The conquest of Egypt, which was completed in 620, allowed Khosrow to concentrate his main forces in Asia Minor and attack the heartland of the Byzantine state and eventually its capital. Meanwhile, Persian naval forces seized the island of Rhodes and several other islands in the eastern Aegean. In response to this multipronged invasion, Byzantine emperor Heraclius organized a counterattack. He surprised the Persians with a swift attack against their positions in eastern Asia Minor. The surprised Sasanian army panicked, and Khosrow fled the battlefield. A Byzantine army entered Azerbaijan; seized the Zoroastrian temple at Shiz, which contained the sacred fire of Adur Gushnasp (Azar Goshnasp); and destroyed it. In response to the Byzantine invasion, the Persians mounted their own counterattack, pushing Heraclius out of Azerbaijan. They then attacked the Byzantine forces in southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria, forcing them to retreat. The Sasanian army continued with its westward march, targeting the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, which it reached in the summer of 626.

In the end, however, the battles fought in the summer of 626 would prove devastating for the Persians. As the Sasanian armies began to suffer significant losses, large Turkish armies allied with the Byzantine emperor invaded the Caucasus and Azerbaijan. A Byzantine army also pushed south toward Azerbaijan and northern Iraq where,

in the Battle of Nineveh, it defeated the Sasanian forces, which had been sent to block Heraclius's advance against the Persian capital of Ctesiphon in southern Iraq.

Twenty-four years of incessant warfare against the Byzantine Empire had exhausted the Sasanian state. Outraged by the defeats their armies had suffered and incensed by Khosrow's obstinacy and intransigence, a group of Persian army officers, joined by sons of several powerful families, organized a coup to overthrow the king and replace him with his son Kavad, known as Shiruya (Shiroy). On the evening of February 23, 628, the plotters staged their coup. Shiruya was released from prison, and a herald proclaimed him the king of kings. The gates of the jails were also opened, and all prisoners, including Roman prisoners, were allowed to escape. Khosrow fled the palace but was later captured. Two days later, his son Shiruya ascended the throne as Kavad II. The new monarch, who had initially promised to restore peace and reverse the harsh policies of his father, initiated a bloodbath by killing all his brothers. He then ordered the execution of his father. The Sasanian dynasty would never recover from this mad rampage. Shiruya died a few months after he had seized the throne. His death signaled the disintegration of the Sasanian Empire. As army commanders and powerful members of the Persian nobility battled among themselves and eliminated one another, Sasanian territory was invaded on all sides by powerful neighbors. The eastern borders of the empire were breached by the Turks, while the Khazars invaded its northern provinces by using the Caucasus region to raid Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Asia Minor. In the end, however, it was the Muslim Arabs bursting out of the Arabian Peninsula who brought about the final collapse of the Sasanian state. The Muslim armies defeated the Sasanian forces first at Qadisiyyah in 636 and again at Nahavand (Nihavand) in western Iran in 642. The last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III, was killed in 651 near Marv in Central Asia.

Ardashir I

The founder and first king of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who ruled from 224 to 239/240 CE. Ardashir, the son of Papak or Pabag (New Persian: Babak), founded the Sasanian dynasty after he defeated and killed the last Arsacid (Parthian) monarch, Artabanus IV, on the battlefield.

There are several legendary accounts that describe Ardashir's family lineage and his rise to power. The inscription of Shapur I, the son of Ardashir, at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in southern Iran

identifies Papak as the father of Ardashir and names Sasan as the ancestor of the family after whom the dynasty was named. *Karnamak-e Ardashir-e Papakan* states that Ardashir was the son of Sasan by the daughter of Papak. The Pahlavi text *Bundahishn* presents Artakhshatar (Ardashir) as the grandson of Papak through his mother (a daughter of Papak) and the son of Sasan (*Bundahishn:* 31.30). The historian Tabari stated that Papak was the father of Ardashir and that Sasan was his grandfather (Tabari: 2.580). Several sources claim that Sasan was the custodian of the temple of Anahid, the Iranian goddess of waters, in the district of Istakhr (Estakhr) in the province of Fars (Tabari: 2.580). These same sources also state that Ardashir's grandmother was a member of a prominent noble family called Bazrangi (Tabari: 2.580).

Papak served as the vassal of Gochihr or Gozihr, the ruler of Istakhr. Gozihr was himself a vassal of the ruling Arsacid dynasty. With permission and support from Gozihr, Papak had his son Ardashir appointed to a military post in Darabgerd, a town near present-day Darab in the province of Fars. After the commander of Darabgerd died, Ardashir succeeded him. Using Darabgerd as his operational base, Ardashir expanded the territory under his control by waging war and defeating several local rulers. With encouragement from Ardashir, Papak revolted against Gozihr and removed him from the throne of Istakhr. From Istakhr, Papak extended his rule to a large portion of Fars province. He may have requested that the ruling Arsacid monarch recognize his older son, Shapur, as the ruler of Istakhr. When the Arsacid king turned down his request, Papak raised the flag of rebellion and proclaimed his independence.

Sasanian rock relief depicts the investiture of the Persian Sasanian monarch Ardashir I, at Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran. After defeating the last Arsacid/Parthian ruler, Artabanus IV, on the battlefield, Ardashir founded the Sasanian dynasty in 224. (Alan Davey)

The revolt of Papak and the subsequent rise of Ardashir to power took place in the context of a civil war within the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire and a series of wars between the Romans and the Arsacid dynasty. After the death of the Arsacid monarch Vologeses V (r. 191/192–207/208 CE), his son Vologeses VI had ascended the throne. Soon, however, the new king was challenged by his younger brother, Artabanus. By around 216 CE, Artabanus had triumphed over his older brother, seizing the Arsacid throne. In 216 CE, the Roman emperor Caracalla asked for the hand of the daughter of Artabanus IV. The Arsacid monarch turned down the request. Caracalla used this response as a convenient pretext to invade Parthian territory. Roman forces reached as far east as Arbela (Arbil/Erbil in present-day northern Iraq), but they failed to defeat the Parthians. When the Roman forces withdrew, Artabanus struck back, demanding the return of territories that the Romans had occupied. Meanwhile, Caracalla was assassinated by Marcinuis, the commander of the imperial guard who installed himself as the new emperor. The new Roman emperor rejected the demands of Artabanus, and war ensued between the two empires. The decisive battle took place at Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey, where the Parthians scored an impressive victory. In the peace treaty signed with the Romans in 218 CE, the emperor agreed to pay a high war indemnity to Artabanus.

The civil war between Vologeses VI and his younger brother Artabanus and the wars between the Arsacids and the Romans provided a golden opportunity for Ardashir to expand his territorial possessions from Fars into the present-day southwestern province of Khuzestan and territories along the northern shores of the Persian Gulf. Ardashir also pushed eastward and seized Kerman in southeastern Iran. These conquests allowed Ardashir to declare himself an independent king. To demonstrate his independence, Ardashir minted his own coins.

The Arsacid monarch seems initially not to have taken this challenge from a petty vassal very seriously. As Ardashir seized more territory and imposed his rule over neighboring kings, however, Artabanus had no other alternative but to respond. In April 224 when the two armies joined battle, Ardashir defeated and killed Artabanus. According to one Roman source, Ardashir conquered the Parthians in three battles and killed their king, Artabanus (Cassius Dio: LXXX.23.2). The victory over Artabanus was celebrated on rock reliefs in Firuzabad in the province of Fars. With the death of Artabanus IV,

Arsacid rule came to a sudden end. Ardashir ascended the throne as the *shahanshah* (king of kings) and the founder of the new Sasanian dynasty. Soon, all the provinces of the Parthian Empire were brought under the authority of the new king of kings. Initially, Ardashir allowed local kings and governors who submitted voluntarily to his rule to retain their power, but he removed those who refused and replaced them with Sasanian princes, often his own sons. It seems that the majority of the powerful landowning families previously allied with the Arsacid dynasty submitted to Ardashir. The inscription of Ardashir's son and successor, Shapur I, includes the names of prominent families such as Suren and Karen, who constituted the backbone of the Arsacid power structure. The Suren were based in Sistan in eastern Iran, and the Karen were dominant in Nahavand in western Iran.

In sharp contrast to the Arsacids, who ruled a highly decentralized political system, Ardashir I embarked on creating a centralized administrative structure, which concentrated absolute power in the hands of the Sasanian monarch, a king who ruled as the representative of god on Earth. Also unlike the Arsacids, who tolerated religious diversity and granted autonomy to the religious communities of their empire, Ardashir's successors imposed Zoroastrianism as the state religion of the Sasanian Empire. As already mentioned, the ancestor of Ardashir, Sasan, was the custodian of the temple of Anahid, the Iranian goddess of water in the district of Istakhr (Tabari: 2.580). According to the Byzantine historian Agathias, Ardashir "was a devotee of the magian religion and an official celebrant of its mysteries. Consequently the priestly caste of the magi rose to inordinate power and arrogance. This body had indeed made its influence felt on previous occasions in the course of its long history, though it had never before been elevated to such a position of privilege and immunity, but had hitherto been officially accorded what in certain respects amounted to an inferior status" (Agathias: 2.26.2).

Historians disagree on the extent of Ardashir's empire. It seems, however, that he brought all the provinces ruled by the Parthians under his authority. In the east, the king of the Kushans, who ruled the area corresponding to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the southern regions of Central Asia, submitted and accepted Sasanian suzerainty. Sasanian forces also seized the island of Bahrain and the nearby southern coast of the Persian Gulf. In 230 CE, Ardashir shifted his focus to the west and attacked Roman possessions in Mesopotamia. According to Cassius Dio, Ardashir viewed himself as the heir to the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, and "he boasted that he would win back everything that the ancient Persians had once held, as far as the

Grecian Sea, claiming that all this was his rightful inheritance from his forefathers" (Cassius Dio: LXXX.23.4). Another author, Herodian, wrote that Ardashir intended to restore the power and glory of the first Persian Empire. He planned to recover "the entire continent opposite Europe … called Asia" for the "Persian empire," believing "these regions to be his by inheritance" (Herodian: 6.2). He therefore declared that "all the countries in that area, including Ionia and Caria, had been ruled by Persian governors, beginning with Cyrus," the founder of the Achaemenid Empire (Herodian: 6.2). The Muslim historian Tabari also wrote that Ardashir had revolted to avenge the blood of his cousin Dara (Darius), son of Dara, who had fought Alexander and been defeated (Tabari: 2.580).

In his initial campaign against the Roman Empire, Ardashir first laid siege to Nisibis in today's southeastern Turkey near the border with Syria and Iraq. He also attacked Hatra, a major religious and commercial center of the Arsacid Empire in present-day northern Iraq, but failed to capture it (Cassius Dio: LXXX.23.2). Alarmed by the attacks on their eastern provinces, the Romans tried to conclude a peace agreement with Ardashir, but the negotiations failed. In 232 CE, the Roman emperor Alexander Severus organized a two-pronged attack against the Sasanian state, targeting Armenia in the north and Mesopotamia in the south. The Roman forces succeeded in seizing Armenia, but their campaign in Mesopotamia fizzled. Ardashir struck back in response. In 238, Sasanian forces attacked and captured Nisibis and Carrhae in present-day southeastern Turkey on the border with Syria. In 240, Ardashir attacked the important trade center of Hatra situated between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in present-day northern Iraq. The town played a vital role in linking the economies of the Near East to Rome. In describing Ardashir's successful campaigns, Herodian wrote that three Roman armies had been ordered to invade Sasanian territory, and "a final rendezvous had been selected to which they were to bring their booty and prisoners" (Herodian: 6.5.8). The Roman emperor, however, failed to support his forces by marching behind them with his own army. Separated from one another and suffering from lack of support from their emperor, the Roman forces fell apart when Ardashir attacked, trapping "the Romans like fish in a net; firing their arrows from all sides at the encircled soldiers," and massacring the whole army (Herodian: 6.5.9). These successful campaigns by Ardashir convinced the Romans to send an army to recapture northern Mesopotamia. Ardashir died in either 240, 241, or 242 CE and was succeeded by his son Shapur, who had ruled with his father as co-regent in the last years of Ardashir's reign.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus IV; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur

I; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Sasanian Empire; Primary Documents: Document 30

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Ardashir II

The king of kings of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who ruled from 379 to 383 CE. Ardashir succeeded Shapur II, the longest-reigning Sasanian monarch. After the death of the Sasanian monarch Hormozd II (r. 303–309 CE), Persian nobles at the court refused to allow any member of the Sasanian royal family to succeed the deceased Persian king. Instead, they designated the unborn child of an expectant wife of Hormozd II as the future king by placing the crown over the belly of the pregnant woman. Thus, before his birth the Persian nobles at the Sasanian court had selected Shapur, who was born after his father's

death, as their king of kings. Once he had attained the appropriate age, Shapur ascended the Sasanian throne and ruled for 70 years, until 379 CE. Before his death, Shapur II appointed Ardashir as his successor. Ardashir ascended the Sasanian throne after Shapur's death in 379.

Some of the Arabic, Persian, and Roman sources claimed that Ardashir II was one of the sons of Hormozd II and the younger brother of Shapur II (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.606). Some other sources, however, stated that Ardashir II was the son of Shapur II (Frye: 316–317). Thus, the relationship between Ardashir II and his immediate predecessor remains a mystery.

Ardashir may have served for a time during Shapur's reign as the governor of Adiabene, which incorporated the core territory of ancient Assyria in present-day northern Iraq and southeastern Asia Minor (today's Turkey). Some sources maintain that when Shapur II appointed Ardashir as his immediate successor in 379, the aging and dying monarch received assurances from Ardashir that he would abdicate the Sasanian throne once Shapur's young son, also named Shapur (the future Shapur III), reached the appropriate age for becoming king.

In 379 after the death of Shapur II, Ardashir ascended the Sasanian throne. The investiture of the new king was celebrated with a rock relief at Taq-e Bostan near modern-day Kermanshah in western Iran. Carved into a rectangular frame, the relief shows Ardashir II, accompanied by two dignitaries, receiving the diadem of power from the hands of a crowned figure who has been identified by some scholars as Shapur II. Behind Ardashir stands Mithra, the sun god, who also was venerated as the guarantor of covenants, alliances, and contracts. Mithra, who wears a crown festooned by 12 rays of sun, holds a *barsom* bundle and is depicted as standing on a lotus flower. The two Sasanian monarchs Ardashir II and Shapur II stand on the body of a vanquished man, presumably a Roman ruler, perhaps Julian the Apostate, who attacked the Sasanian state in 363 and was defeated before reaching the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon.

The short reign of Ardashir II was uneventful. The Sasanians tried to diffuse a crisis in Armenia, and though the tension between the Roman and Sasanian Empires remained high, Ardashir did not fight in either a defensive or an offensive campaign in the west. Ardashir II either died or was deposed in 383 CE. The historian Tabari wrote that Ardashir II killed many members of the Persian nobility and court dignitaries, and in turn he was deposed after ruling for four years (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.606). Shapur III, the son of Shapur II, succeeded Ardashir II as the new ruler of the Sasanian Empire.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Taq-e Bostan; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur II; Shapur III

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Ardashir III

King of kings of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who ruled for a short period after the death of his father, Kavad II Shiruya (Shiroy). The short reign of Ardashir III lasted from 628 to 630 CE. Ardashir's mother was a Byzantine Greek noblewoman named Anzoi. Ardashir's father, Shiruya, had seized the throne after participating in a coup against his father, Khosrow II Parvez. After seizing the Sasanian throne, Shiruya ordered the imprisonment and murder of his father as well as the execution of all his brothers. After ruling for only several months, however, Shiruya died, the victim of a plague that already had devastated the western provinces of the Sasanian Empire. After Shiruya's death the high officials at the court chose his seven-year-old son, Ardashir, as the new *shahanshah* (king of kings). Given the very young age of the new monarch, actual power resided with prominent courtiers and high government officials, particularly the capable Meh Adur Gushnasp, who acted as regent.

Sasanian silver-gilt dish showing the Sasanian king of kings Ardashir III hunting moufflon. Ardashir III was the son of the Sasanian monarch, Sheroye (Kavad II), who murdered many princes of the Sasanian dynasty. Ardashir III was seven years old when he ascended the Persian throne. His reign lasted only one year and seven months. (CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)

The young king and his regent faced an empire in rapid decline. Shiruya's short and murderous reign had undermined the power and legitimacy of the Sasanian central government, which was being challenged by internal and external threats. The Persian nobility and provincial magnates who had accumulated enormous power refused to obey the authority of the Sasanian king. The Sasanian state lacked the means to impose its power and authority over the provinces. In many parts of the empire, the governors, powerful landowning families, and military commanders ruled as autonomous kings. In addition to this, tribal groups from the southwest (Arabia) and from the north (the Caucasus and Central Asia) continued to attack the empire.

Under these chaotic circumstances, the powerful and capable

Sasanian army commander, Shahrbaraz, decided to remove the young king and install himself on the Persian throne. At the time, Shahrbaraz was responsible for the defense and security of the Sasanian–Byzantine border. With the support and blessing of Byzantine emperor Heraclius, Shahrbaraz attacked the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. The Persian commander sacked the capital city and murdered Ardashir III, his regent Meh-Adur Gushnasp, and many courtiers and high government officials. In 630 Shahrbaraz ascended the Sasanian throne as the new king of kings, but he himself was murdered after only two months. Thus, the once-powerful Sasanian Empire had already begun to disintegrate from within several years before its armies were defeated by invading Arabs in the Battle of Qadisiyyah in 636 CE.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Kavad II Shiruya; Khosrow II Parvez; Yazdegerd III

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Azarmidokht

A Persian queen who ruled the Sasanian Empire for a short time in 630 CE, Azarmidokht was the daughter of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Parvez (r. 590–628 CE). Khosrow II was overthrown by one of his sons, Kavad II, also known as Shiruya (Shiroy), in 628 CE. Shiruya, who had initially promised to restore peace and reverse the harsh policies of his father, initiated a bloodbath by killing all of his brothers. He then ordered the execution of his father. The Sasanian Empire would never recover from this mad rampage. Having decimated the Sasanian royal family, Shiruya himself died a few months after he had ascended the throne. Shiruya's successor, Ardashir III (r. 628–630 CE), who was very young and powerless, could not restore order and impose his authority over the army. The Sasanian commander Shahrbaraz, who had secured the support of the

Byzantine emperor Heraclius, rose against Ardashir, killed the Sasanian monarch, and proclaimed himself king of kings. But Shahrbaraz himself was murdered less than two months after seizing the reins of power. After the short reign of Khosrow III for only a few months, because all the sons of Khosrow II had been murdered, a daughter, Boran (Puran) (r. 630–631 CE), ascended the Sasanian throne. Boran was credited for her commitment to justice as well as her compassion and generosity toward her subjects, which was reflected in her decision to forgive a portion of required taxes. She was also noted for her decision to mint new coins and repair roads and bridges. The queen, however, lacked any power to restore calm and order to the Sasanian Empire, which was disintegrating rapidly from within. Generals, courtiers, and powerful members of the Persian nobility continued to fight among themselves. As chaos and decline accelerated, Sasanian territory was invaded by the Turks and the Khazars. The powerless queen could not do anything to reverse the process of political disintegration. Boran died after a year and four months on the throne (Tabari: 2.783). She was succeeded by her sister Azarmidokht, another daughter of Khosrow II. Azarmidokht's reign, however, proved to be short. According to the historian Tabari, Farrokh Hormozd, the military governor of the northeastern province of Khorasan, asked the Sasanian queen for her hand in marriage. Azarmidokht, who feared the powerful army commander, agreed to the marriage. When the queen and Farrokh Hormozd came together in the royal quarter of the palace, Azarmidokht had the commander assassinated. To exact revenge for the murder of his father, Farrokh Hormozd's son Rostam attacked and sacked Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital. Azarmidokht was captured and executed by the victorious Rostam (Tabari: 783–784).

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Boran (Puran); Kavad II Shiruya; Khosrow I Anushiravan; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Babak

Babak (Middle Persian: Papak or Pabag) was the father of Ardashir, the founder of the Persian Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). There are numerous but contradictory traditions and accounts regarding Babak and his relationship to Sasan, the ancestor of the Sasanian dynasty. The historian Tabari stated that Sasan was the father of Babak (Tabari: 580), but other sources contradict Tabari's account. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in the southern Iranian province of Fars, the second monarch of the Sasanian dynasty, Shapur I, called Sasan a lord, while he referred to Babak as a king. The ninth-century Pahlavi text *Bundahishn* states that Ardashir was the son of Babak, and his mother was the daughter of Sasan. It also claims that Sasan was himself the son of Behafrid (Vehafrid) (*Bundahishn:* 31.30). Babak was most probably a local king who ruled a small kingdom in Fars in present-day southern Iran. The capital of this kingdom was Istakhr. Babak was a vassal of the Arsacid dynasty, which ruled Iran at the time. He apparently revolted against his Arsacid overlord but did not succeed in gaining his independence. After Babak's death, one of his sons, Shapur, succeeded him. Only after the death of Shapur did Babak's other son, Ardashir, emerge as the ruler of Istakhr. Ardashir defeated the Arsacid monarch Artabanus IV in 224 and established the Sasanian monarchy. Archaeologists have not discovered any coins dating back to the reign of Babak, although his image appears on the coins minted by his son, Ardashir.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; Shapur I; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III

The fourth, fifth, and sixth kings of the Sasanian dynasty were Bahram I, Bahram II, and Bahram III. Bahram I was the father of Bahram II, and Bahram II was the father of Bahram III. As a name, Bahram appears as Wahram or Warahram in Middle Persian.

Bahram I ruled from 273 to 276 CE. He ascended the throne after his brother Hormozd I died in 273. Bahram was the son of Shapur I, the second king of the Sasanian monarchy. During his father's long reign, Bahram served as the governor of the province of Gilan on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Thus, his title was Gēlan Shah, the shah or king of Gilan. In his inscription on the wall of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in southern Iran, Shapur I honored his sons by mentioning their names and titles. The names were listed as Bahram, the shah (ruler) of Gilan; Shapur, the shah of Mesene (also called Characene or Meshan, located south of Babylonia in present-day southern Iraq and Kuwait); Hormozd Ardashir, the great king of Armenia; and Narseh, the shah of Sakas based in Sistan in eastern Iran. The order in which the names of the princes of the Sasanian royal family were listed demonstrates that Bahram was the oldest son of Shapur I. Despite his age, however, Shapur chose Hormozd Ardashir (Hormozd I) as his successor. Bahram's disappointment in this, if any, was short-lived, because Hormozd I died after a very short reign. Bahram succeeded his brother with support from Kartir, the powerful Zoroastrian priest.

The reign of Bahram would have been viewed as short and uneventful had it not been for the king's reversal of his father's policy toward non-Zoroastrian religious communities. Despite his devotion to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Bahram's father, Shapur I, had adopted a wise and balanced approach toward non-Zoroastrian communities in his empire. While respecting the teachings of his own religion and supporting the Zoroastrian priesthood, Shapur had also allowed Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus to practice their religion without persecution. He also allowed the Iranian prophet Mani to preach in the Sasanian domains and even accompany the king during his military campaigns. Supported and encouraged by the influential Zoroastrian priest Kartir, Bahram reversed the policy of his father regarding the missionary activities of Mani. Shapur I and Hormozd I had granted Mani the right to travel and preach within the borders of the Sasanian state. Bahram I, however, rejected the policies of his father and brother and ordered Mani to present himself at the royal court. There, Mani was questioned and condemned. He died shortly afterward in prison. The suppression of Mani's followers was organized by Kartir and the Zoroastrian religious establishment, who

used the persecution of religious minorities as a means of increasing and expanding their immense influence. The Zoroastrian religious leadership viewed Mani as an eclectic thinker and a dangerous heretic who was introducing an esoteric interpretation of Zoroastrianism, one that had been infected by non-Zoroastrian (i.e., Jewish, Buddhist, and Christian) concepts and doctrines. With support from Bahram I, Kartir established the Zoroastrian state church, which tried to impose its unchallenged monopoly over the religious and cultural life of the Sasanian Empire.

Bahram I is memorialized through a rock relief at Bishapur in southern Iran. The relief depicts the investiture of the Sasanian monarch who, while sitting majestically on his horse, receives the diadem of royalty from the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda). After he ascended the Sasanian throne in 297 CE, Narseh tampered with the rock relief and "substituted his own name for that of Bahram" (Shahbazi: Bahrām [2]).

After the death of Bahram I, his son Bahram II ascended the throne and ruled from 276 to 293 CE. This succession most likely was controversial, because Narseh, a son of Shapur I and the king of Armenia, was a claimant to the Sasanian throne and must have felt skipped over by his nephew and his supporters. Among the most powerful of Bahram II's supporters was the powerful and influential Zoroastrian priest Kartir. The power and influence of the Zoroastrian priesthood, led by Kartir, which had reached new heights during the reign of Bahram I, continued to grow during the reign of Bahram II. Bahram II showered Kartir with new honors and titles. This unwavering support from Bahram II allowed the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy to adopt an increasingly intolerant attitude toward the non-Zoroastrian religious communities of the empire, particularly the followers of the Iranian prophet Mani (i.e., the Manicheans), the Christians, the Jews, and the Buddhists.

The most important challenge to Bahram's authority came from his brother Hormozd, who was a governor in eastern Iran. The revolt of Hormozd against the crown ignited a civil war. While Bahram II moved east to suppress this rebellion, a large Roman army under the command of Emperor Carus invaded Sasanian territory through northern Mesopotamia. The Romans devastated Mesopotamia and eventually reached Seleucia-on-Tigris River in present-day southern Iraq. The city of Seleucia sat on the west bank of the Tigris opposite the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. These two defenseless cities offered little resistance to the Romans. Emperor Carus, however, died under suspicious circumstances shortly after his military victories, and the Romans withdrew their forces from the Persian capital.

Sasanian rock relief at Bishapur in southern Iran, depicting the Persian Sasanian monarch Bahram I receiving the diadem of kingship from the god Ahura Mazda. The power and influence of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy significantly increased during the reign of Bahram I, who persecuted the Iranian prophet Mani and his followers. (Richard Well)

Meanwhile, Bahram II scored a decisive victory against the pretender Hormozd and installed his own son, Bahram (later Bahram III), as the king of Sakastan (Sistan), with the honorific title of Sakan Shah (King of Sakas). Bahram II returned to Mesopotamia, reclaimed his capital, and initiated peace negotiations with the Romans.

Bahram II ordered the carving of several rock reliefs at various sites in southern and western Iran. These reliefs depict the Sasanian monarch in his royal regalia in battle or surrounded by members of the royal family, the chief Zoroastrian priest, and high dignitaries. Bahram II died in 293 CE and was replaced by his son Bahram III. Though Bahram III enjoyed the support of a small group of court dignitaries and provincial governors, the majority among the Persian nobility and Zoroastrian priesthood, including the powerful high priest Kartir, opposed his accession to the Sasanian throne and instead favored Narseh, one of the sons of Shapur I, the second king of the Sasanian dynasty. Determined to depose Bahram III, they invited Narseh, who at the time ruled Armenia, to travel to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon and seize the throne. Narseh and his supporters marched from Armenia and met with their supporters at Paikuli, in present-day Kurdish-populated northern Iraq near the Iranian–Iraqi border. An inscription in Middle Persian at Paikuli provides the justification for Narseh's revolt against Bahram III. From northern Mesopotamia, Narseh moved against Ctesiphon and captured the capital. Thus, after ruling the Sasanian Empire only for a few months,

Bahram III was forced to abdicate in favor of Narseh. There is no information on Bahram III after he lost the Sasanian throne.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Hormozd I; Narseh; *Prophets:* Kartir

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Bahram IV

A Sasanian king of kings who ruled from 388 to 399 CE. Bahram was either the son of the Sasanian monarch Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE) or a son of the Sasanian king Shapur III who ruled from 383 to 388 CE. During the reign of Shapur III, Bahram served as the governor of Kerman in present-day southeastern Iran. Thus, Bahram assumed the title Kerman Shah (Kermanshah), or the king or ruler of Kerman. In 388 CE, Shapur III was murdered in a conspiracy hatched by a group of Persian nobles. After the death of Shapur III, Bahram ascended the throne.

The conflict between the Romans and the Persian Sasanians was usually centered on control of Mesopotamia and Armenia. Shapur III had already negotiated with the Romans about the future of Armenia. Both sides had agreed to divide Armenia into Roman-controlled and Persian-dominated spheres. The agreement did not, however, survive Shapur's death. In 389 Bahram IV tried to revive the agreement, which Shapur III had reached with the Romans by negotiating with the Roman emperor Theodosius. The two powers agreed to divide Armenia. In 394, however, Khosrow, the Armenian ruler of the Sasanian-dominated portion of Armenia, threw off Persian suzerainty, defecting and forming an alliance with the Romans. Bahram IV responded by imprisoning Khosrow and appointing his brother Bahram Shapur as the new governor of the Persian-ruled Armenia.

In 395 the Sasanian Empire was attacked by nomadic Huns, who used the Caucasus region as a corridor to invade the northern provinces of the Persian state. After penetrating as far south as Mesopotamia, the Sasanian armies finally managed to contain and defeat the invading Huns. Bahram IV has been described as a weak and unpopular ruler, which usually means that he was disliked by the powerful members of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. Bahram IV was eventually murdered by a group of conspirators. One of the enduring legacies of Bahram IV's reign is the present-day city of Kermanshah, which the Sasanian monarch founded. The city was named after Bahram IV, the former shah of Kerman who had ruled as the governor of Kerman during the reign of Shapur III. Kermanshah, which was situated on the main trade route connecting Central Asia and Iran to Mesopotamia and beyond, remains a vibrant urban center in present-day western Iran.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Shapur III; Yazdegerd I

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Bahram V

Bahram V, also known as Bahram-e Gor or Gur, was a Persian king of kings who ruled the Sasanian Empire from 421 to 439 CE. He was one of the sons of the Sasanian king Yazdegerd I, who ruled from 399 to 421 CE. Bahram's mother was Soshandokht, the daughter of the Jewish exilarch. When Yazdegerd I died in 421 CE, the Persian nobility refused to allow any of his sons to ascend the Sasanian throne. The oldest son of Yazdegerd, Shapur, who served as the governor of Armenia, marched to the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, to claim his father's throne. He was, however, betrayed and murdered before he could assume the reins of power. With the main contender to the throne eliminated, the nobility installed a Sasanian prince named Khosrow as the new king of kings. The second son of Yazdegerd I, Bahram refused to accept this decision, however, and

raised the flag of rebellion. From a very young age, Bahram had been raised among the Arab Lakhmid tribe of southern Iraq. Determined to seize the throne of the Sasanian Empire, he organized an army with the support and assistance of his friend and mentor, Mundhir I, the Arab Lakhmid ruler of Hira and a Sasanian vassal. Bahram marched from Hira in southwestern Mesopotamia, a short distance from the present-day southern Iraqi city of Najaf, to Ctesiphon and, after a short siege, entered the capital and established himself as the new Sasanian king of kings.

The historian Tabari wrote that Bahram was selected over Khosrow after he displayed exceptional audacity and bravery in a trial that demanded that both claimants to the throne snatch the symbols of royalty from between two ferocious lions. To determine who would seize the throne of the empire, Khosrow and Bahram were required to fight and kill the lions and thereby win the royal insignia by risking their lives. Khosrow refused to go through the ordeal and declined the challenge. Bahram, however, showed no reluctance. Without any hesitation, he immediately attacked and killed the lions and seized both the robe and the crown, forcing the very nobles who had deposed his father and murdered his brother to accept him as their suzerain (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.619–620).

Silver coin of the Persian Sasanian monarch Bahram V. Known as Bahram-e Gur, the Sasanian king of kings is known in Persian literature for his valor on the battlefield, as well as his victories against the Romans and the Turks. The Sasanian monarch was also celebrated for his love for music and hunting, hence the title of Gur, meaning Onager, on account of his love of hunting these Asian wild asses. (Yale Gallery of Art)

Shortly after he ascended the throne, Bahram marched against the Hephthalites who were threatening the northeastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire. He defeated the enemy and in the process extended Sasanian rule beyond the Oxus River. To consolidate Sasanian rule in the northeast, Bahram appointed his brother, Narseh, as the governor of Khorasan, with his capital at Balkh in present-day northern Afghanistan (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.622). To express his gratitude to the supreme god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and to demonstrate his devotion to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Bahram donated a significant portion of the booty he had collected from the Hephthalites to Adur Gushnasp, one of the three most sacred fires of ancient Iran,

which was housed at a Zoroastrian fire temple at Shiz (present-day Takht-e Soleyman), located in today's northwestern Iran (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.622–623). Upon his return to the capital, Bahram shifted his focus to the west and a military campaign against the Romans. The ensuing war between the two empires, which was partially centered on the control of Armenia, proved inconclusive. After a series of skirmishes, the two warring powers agreed to end the conflict and sign a peace treaty. The agreement guaranteed freedom of religion for Christians in the Sasanian domains and for Zoroastrians living in the Roman Empire. The Romans agreed to make payments to Bahram in return for the Sasanian monarch protecting the northern boundaries of the Caucasus against invasions by the Huns. Bahram used the peace treaty to establish Sasanian control over Armenia. The Armenian king Artashes was removed, and a *marzbān,* or military commander in charge of defending the border (i.e., a margrave), was installed in his place.

In managing the daily affairs of his vast empire, Bahram V relied heavily on his wise, competent, and ambitious chief minister (*wuzurg farmadār*), Mihr Narseh. When the king was leading his army on the battlefield, the minister acted as the principal administrator of the empire. To consolidate his position at the court, the minister appointed his three sons as the leaders of the three main social estates recognized by the Sasanian dynasty, namely the priests, the warriors, and the third estate, which consisted of peasant farmers and artisans. The power and influence of the minister grew as the Sasanian king began to devote much of his time to hunting, carousing, and revelry. Mihr Narseh was, however, dismissed from his post suddenly after he was accused of committing a sin. The nature of the sin has not been specified, but as a punishment, the disgraced minister was forced to work as a servant in fire temples, where, together with his wife, he remained until the death of Bahram.

Iranian historical tradition offers numerous legendary accounts of Bahram V and his heroic feats. He was generally celebrated as a wise and valiant ruler, a brilliant hunter, and a fun-loving monarch who enjoyed sports, particularly chase and polo, as well as music, drinking, and feasting. Some sources claimed that Bahram loved music and feasting so much that he imported musicians from India. His nickname, Gor or Gur, refers to the onager or Asian wild ass and reflects his love and devotion to the art and sport of hunting wild animals. Though celebrated in many historical accounts as a brave, brilliant, and capable ruler, his reign and the remaining six decades of the fifth century may be regarded as the beginning of the decline of the Sasanian Empire. During the reigns of his son Yazdegerd II and his grandson Peroz the power of the Sasanian state waned, and Persian

armies began to suffer humiliating defeats at the hands of invading nomadic groups from Central Asia. Peroz would be defeated three times by the invading Hephthalites, who killed him on the battlefield and imposed a heavy annual tribute on the Sasanian state. The decline of the empire also was reflected in the growing gap between the rulers and the ruled, which resulted in the emergence of socioreligious movements that demanded the introduction of radical reforms.

The various accounts of Bahram's death differ widely. Some sources claim that he died while hunting after falling into a deep pit or swamp; others, such as the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi, contend that he died peacefully in his bed. Upon Bahram V's death in 439 CE, his son Yazdegerd II ascended the royal throne and ruled the Sasanian Empire until 457.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Yazdegerd I; Yazdegerd II; Primary Documents: Document 38

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Bahram VI Chobin

Bahram VI, also known as Bahram Chobin (Bahram Chubin), was a military commander in the Sasanian army during the reign of the Sasanian king of kings Hormozd IV (r. 579–590 CE). Bahram rose through the military ranks to command the Persian forces fighting the invading Hephthalites in northeastern Iran. He defeated the Hephthalites and their principal backer, the *khaqan* of the Turk Empire, in a series of campaigns in Central Asia. Bahram eventually revolted against the Sasanian monarch and seized the throne, ruling as Bahram VI from 590 to 591 CE. Though his reign proved to be short-lived, Bahram's life and accomplishments became legendary tales after he was assassinated by the agents of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz).

Bahram's father, Bahram Goshnasp, hailed from the powerful landowning Mehran family, who were based in Ray south of modern-day Tehran. Because Bahram was slim and tall, he was nicknamed Chobin, meaning "the Wooden Shaft," or "the Javelin-like." In his *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the Persian poet Ferdowsi described Bahram as a very tall and swarthy warrior with black frizzy hair. Ferdowsi also praised the Sasanian general as a highly skilled horseback rider. Bahram had served as an army commander during the Sasanian–Byzantine wars after 572 CE and rose through the ranks to command the army of the north, which incorporated Azerbaijan and Media. In 588 CE when Hephthalite hordes from Central Asia, backed by the Western Turk state, invaded the northeastern regions of the Sasanian state, Bahram was appointed commander of the Sasanian army. He marched against the nomadic invaders and defeated them in Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan) and captured the important city of Balkh. The victorious Iranian army then crossed the Oxus River into Transoxiana, the region lying between the Oxus and Jaxartes Rivers, and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Turk army, killing the Turk *khaqan*.

The impressive victories of Bahram aroused the jealousy of the Sasanian monarch Hormozd IV, who appointed his brilliant general to the difficult task of conquering the kingdom of Lazica. Lazica was situated on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, corresponding with the western region of the present-day Republic of Georgia. The king of Lazica ruled as a vassal of the Byzantine emperor, who viewed the province as an important geographical barrier, one that denied the Persians an access route to the Black Sea. Despite his usual display of

courage and bravery, Bahram suffered a defeat at the hands of the Romans. This defeat provided Hormozd IV with the convenient justification to dismiss his popular and charismatic commander from his post. Humiliated by the king's decision, Bahram rose in rebellion against Hormozd, who had become increasingly unpopular among the ruling elite. Hormozd had cut the salaries paid to army officers and had executed powerful members of the Persian nobility. Having organized a highly disciplined army, Bahram marched against the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, near modern-day Baghdad in present-day southern Iraq. As Bahram neared Ctesiphon, the Persian nobility, led by two of the king's brothers-in-law, staged a palace coup. Hormozd IV was detained, blinded, and subsequently executed. The conspirators placed Hormozd's oldest son, Khosrow, on the throne. Khosrow II had played a prominent role in the conspiracy hatched by his two uncles to overthrow his father. As the new king and his supporters prepared themselves for a confrontation with Bahram, Khosrow adopted a carrot-and-stick approach. He wrote to Bahram and reminded the charismatic commander of his legitimate claim to the Sasanian throne:

> Khosroes [Khosrow], king of kings, ruler over the ruling, lord of the peoples, prince of peace, salvation of men, among gods the good and eternally living man, among men the most esteemed god, the highly illustrious, the victor, the one who rises with the sun and who lends the night his eyesight, the one famed through his ancestors, the king who hates war, the benefactor who engaged the Asones [Sasones = Sasanians] and saved the Persians their kingship—to Baram [Bahram], the general of the Persians, our friend…. We have also taken over the royal throne in a lawful manner and have not upset Persian customs…. We have so firmly decided not to take off the diadem that we even expected to rule over other worlds, if this were possible…. If you wish your welfare, think about what is to be done. (Wiesehöfer: 169–170)

Bahram dismissed Khosrow's charm offensive and continued with his march against the Sasanian capital. As Bahram's army approached Ctesiphon, Khosrow and his supporters fled the city. Before reaching Azerbaijan, their intended destination, however, the Sasanian army accompanying Khosrow was intercepted and defeated by Bahram. Having survived defeat at the hands of Bahram, Khosrow fled west into Byzantine territory, seeking support from the emperor, Maurice, who agreed to provide him with financial and military assistance in return for significant territorial concessions. Meanwhile, after defeating Khosrow and his army, Bahram marched to Ctesiphon and seized the Sasanian capital in 590 CE and ascended the throne as the *shahanshah,* or king of kings (Tabari: 2.723). He denounced Ardashir I,

the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, as the son of a shepherd, an upstart, and a usurper and called for the restoration of the Arsacid dynasty, which had been overthrown in 224 CE.

Bahram's dream of restoring the Arsacid state did not materialize, however, and his reign proved to be short-lived. The defeated Khosrow returned to Iran with a large army of Byzantine mercenaries. He received further assistance from army units organized by his supporters in Armenia. Bahram rushed to Azerbaijan to confront the threat from Khosrow and his armies, but he was defeated after a three-day battle near Lake Orumiyeh in present-day northwestern Iran. Bahram's family, including his wives and children, were captured by Khosrow. With the Sasanian capital also falling into the hands of Khosrow, Bahram had no alternative but to flee east into Transoxiana and seek refuge in the Turk territory north of the Oxus River. Even as he fled, the armies of the powerful Karen family based in Shahr-e Qumis in the northeastern province of Khorasan attempted to block his escape route. Despite these difficulties, Bahram reached the territory of the Turk state. The *khaqan* of the Turks appointed him a commander in his army. Khosrow II, who was frightened by the prospect of Bahram's return, arranged for his assassination. The historian Tabari claimed that the assassination was carried out through distribution of gifts and bribes among the members of the Turk royal family, particularly the queen (Tabari: 2.733). After his death at the hands of an assassin, Bahram joined the ranks of Iran's legendary heroes. He was celebrated in Persian literature as a fearless and valiant warrior, a compassionate and just ruler, and a shrewd and gifted tactician. His fame and popularity survived the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651 CE and the arrival of Islam. In the ninth century CE when the Persian Samanids founded a new empire in Central Asia and northeastern Iran, they claimed direct descent from Bahram Chobin (al-Narshakhi: 82; Anonymous: 89).

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Hormozd IV; Khosrow II Parvez

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Balash

Sasanian king of kings who ruled from 484 to 488 CE. Balash (Valakhsh) was the son of the Sasanian monarch Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE) and the brother of the Sasanian king of kings, Peroz (r. 459–484 CE). Balash ascended the throne after Peroz was killed in a battle against the Hephthalites in 484.

Peroz had spent much of his reign fighting the Hephthalites, who had breached the northeastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire from Central Asia. The confrontations of Peroz with the Hephthalites proved to be disastrous for the Persian monarch and the Sasanian state. In the first campaign against the Hephthalites the Persian army suffered a devastating defeat, and Peroz was captured. Peroz was released after he promised to pay a substantial ransom. To avenge the humiliation he had suffered, he attacked the Hephthalites for a second time. Once again the Persians were defeated. This time, Peroz could not pay the heavy ransom demanded from the Hephthalites. As a compromise, he was forced to leave his son, Kavad, as a hostage with the Hephthalites. But Peroz refused to accept defeat. He therefore organized a third campaign and, against the advice of his courtiers, attacked the Hephthalites for the third time in 484. Once again the Sasanian army suffered a humiliating defeat, and Peroz and several members of the Sasanian royal family were killed on the battlefield (Tabari: 2.628). The entire Sasanian royal harem, including all of the king's wives and one of his daughters, as well as the chief Zoroastrian

priest, were captured by the Hephthalites. The death of the Persian king and the disintegration of his formidable army allowed the Hephthalites to invade and occupy the eastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanians had no other alternative but to sue for peace and agree to pay an annual tribute.

The relegation of the Sasanian Empire from a world power to a tributary of the emerging Hephthalite Empire signaled one of the lowest points in Sasanian history. The growing weakness of the Sasanian state allowed the powerful members of the Persian nobility to reemerge and interfere in the decision-making process at the royal court. Among the members of the Persian nobility who played an important role after the death of Peroz was Zarmehr Sokhra of the Karen family, who fought the Hephthalites courageously after the death of Peroz on the battlefield and saved the Sasanian army from total annihilation at the hands of the enemy. Another nobleman, Shapur, who was a member of the powerful Mehran family, criticized Peroz for his tyrannical behavior and his refusal to consult before embarking on adventurous military campaigns. With the power of the Sasanian dynasty diminished, the powerful members of the Persian nobility emerged as the king makers. When a son of Peroz, Zarer, attempted to seize the throne after his father's death, the Persian nobles assassinated him and instead chose Balash, a brother of Peroz, as the next Sasanian king of kings.

A mild-mannered and peace-loving prince, Balash was viewed as a king who would not make reckless decisions and embark on adventurous military campaigns without consulting the Persian nobility. Once on the throne, Balash displayed his benevolence toward his Christian subjects by allowing them to practice their religion without fear of persecution. Despite his best efforts to restore peace and order, however, the Sasanian state could not recover from chaos and decline, which had already started during the reign of Peroz. The royal treasury was depleted, and the king of kings could not pay the salaries of his troops. Once again Zarmehr Sokhra and Shapur acted as the king makers, deposing Balash and passing the throne to Kavad, the son of Peroz who had spent many years as a hostage with the Hephthalites. Kavad's familiarity and friendship with the Hephthalites could help the Sasanians rebound from one of the worst and most humiliating periods in their long and glorious history. The fate of Balash after he was deposed remains uncertain.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Kavad I; Peroz; *Peoples:* Hephthalites

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Boran (Puran)

Boran (Puran) was a princess of the Sasanian dynasty who ascended the throne as queen of the Sasanian Empire in 630 CE and ruled until sometime in 631. She seized the reins of power at the historical juncture when Persian power was disintegrating rapidly. Her ascension to the throne demonstrates that the Sasanian political system was open to a female member of the royal family ruling the empire in the absence of a legitimate male candidate.

Boran was the daughter of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz), who ruled from 590 to 628 CE. Khosrow was overthrown by Kavad, also known as Shiruya (Shiroy), one of his sons who joined a conspiracy against his father. The new monarch promised to end the long and exhausting wars with the Byzantine Empire, restore peace, and reverse the excesses of his father. Instead, Shiruya embarked on a campaign of terror against his own family, ordering the execution of all the male members of the Sasanian royal family, including his father and all his brothers. The Sasanian Empire never recovered from this murderous rampage. Having decimated the Sasanian royal family, Shiruya himself died a few months after he had ascended the Persian throne. Shiruya's successor, Ardashir III (r. 628–630 CE), could not restore order or impose his authority over the army. The Sasanian commander Shahrbaraz, who had secured the support of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, rose against Ardashir, killed the Sasanian monarch, and proclaimed himself king of kings. But Shahrbaraz himself was murdered less than two months after seizing the reins of power. After the short reign of Khosrow III in 630 and in the absence of a male successor old enough to assume the reins of power, a daughter, Boran, ascended the Sasanian throne.

Boran was credited for her commitment to justice as well as her compassion and generosity toward her subjects, which was reflected in her decision to forgive a portion of required taxes. She was also

noted for her decision to mint new coins and repair roads and bridges. The queen, however, lacked any power to restore calm and order to the Sasanian Empire, which was disintegrating from within. Generals, courtiers, and powerful members of the Persian nobility continued to fight among themselves. As chaos and decline accelerated, Sasanian territory was invaded by the Turks and the Khazars. In the end, however, it was a powerful force bursting out of the Arabian Peninsula, namely the Arab Muslim armies, that brought about the collapse of the Sasanian state. The powerless queen could not do anything to reverse the process of political disintegration. Boran died after a year and four months on the throne. She was succeeded by her sister Azarmidokht, another daughter of Khosrow II who could only manage to rule for a few months. Eventually after a succession of several short-ruled and powerless monarchs, including Hormozd V (r. 631–632 CE) and Khosrow IV (r. 631–633 CE), the Persian nobility placed Yazdegerd, a male member of the Sasanian dynasty, on the throne. Yazdegerd was a son of the Sasanian prince Shahryar, who had been murdered by Shiruya in 628, and a grandson of Khosrow II. He was only eight years old when he ascended the throne. Yazdegerd was crowned not in the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon but in the fire temple of Ardashir I at Istakhr in southern Iran. In 636 and again in 642 CE, the Sasanian armies were defeated in battles against the Arab Muslims. The Sasanian Empire came to an end in 651 CE, when Yazdegerd III was murdered by a miller with whom he had sought refuge outside the city of Marv in Khorasan.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Azarmidokht; Khosrow II Parvez; Kavad II Shiruya; Yazdegerd III

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Hormozd I

Hormozd I was the third king of the Sasanian monarchy who ruled from 270 or 272 to 273 BCE. He was the son of Shapur I and the grandson of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian state. After his father attacked and conquered Armenia, Hormozd was appointed king of the Armenians. Hormozd played an important role in the second campaign of his father against the Romans, which began in 253 CE and ended in 256 CE and during which Sasanian forces captured Cappadocia in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

Hormozd, although not the oldest son of his father, ascended the Sasanian throne after the death of Shapur I. The oldest son of Shapur I was Bahram, who succeeded Hormozd after he died following a short reign. The coinage minted during Hormozd's reign declares him as the king of kings (*shahanshah*) of Iranians and non-Iranians (Ērāns and Anērāns). The construction of the town of Hormozd Ardashir has been ascribed to Hormozd I. During his short reign, Hormozd followed the example set by his father, Shapur I, and allowed the Iranian prophet Mani to continue his missionary activities.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III; Shapur I

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Hormozd II

Hormozd II was the ruler of the Persian Sasanian Empire from 302 to 309 CE. He ascended the Sasanian throne as the *shahanshah,* or king of kings, of Iranians and non-Iranians (Ērāns and Anērāns) in 302. Six years before in 297 CE, Hormozd's father, Narseh, had been defeated by the Romans near present-day Erzurum in eastern Turkey. Narseh fled the battlefield, but his queen as well as several members of the royal family were captured by the enemy. The Romans imposed a humiliating peace treaty, forcing the Sasanians to cede Armenia,

Iberia (modern-day Georgia), and several provinces in Mesopotamia. The Tigris River was established as the boundary between the Roman Empire and Iran.

Rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars in southern Iran depicts the Persian Sasanian king of kings Hormozd II on horseback striking a mounted foe with his lance. Not much is known about the reign of Hormozd II, which began harshly and ended under suspicious circumstances as the king was hunting. (Westend61 GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo)

When Hormozd II ascended the Sasanian throne, he inherited an empire reeling from military defeat and dominated by the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. The powerful members of the nobility had become sufficiently powerful to interfere in the empire's decision-making process. We know very little about the reign of Hormozd II. The Muslim historians claimed that Hormozd II attacked Syria and demanded tribute from the Arab king of the Ghassanids, who responded by seeking support from Rome. According to these sources, the Sasanians killed the Ghassanid king before the arrival of the Romans. Hormozd had many children. His son and successor, Shapur II, was born after Hormozd's death and ruled from 309 to 379 CE.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Narseh; Shapur II

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Hormozd III

A king of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who ruled for two years between 457 and 459. He was the son of the Sasanian monarch Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE). When Yazdegerd died, a battle for succession erupted between his two sons. At Ray, south of present-day Tehran, the older son, Hormozd, ascended the Sasanian throne, while the younger son, Peroz, fled to the northeastern province of Khorasan and began to raise an army to seize the throne. Meanwhile, Denag (Dinak), the mother of Hormozd III and Peroz, was ruling the empire from its capital at Ctesiphon in present-day southern Iraq (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.628). The reign of Hormozd proved to be short-lived. In 459, Peroz, who had organized an army that included nomadic warriors recruited from Hephthalites of Tokharestan in present-day northern Afghanistan, attacked Hormozd and defeated him on the battlefield. Hormozd III was imprisoned, and no mention of him is made after his overthrow. Having triumphed over his older brother, Peroz seized the Sasanian throne and proclaimed himself king of kings.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Peroz; Yazdegerd II

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Hormozd IV

Hormozd IV was a king of the Persian Sasanian Empire. He ruled from 579 and 590 CE. Hormozd, the son of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE), ascended the throne in 579 CE after the death of his father and ruled until 590 CE, when he was assassinated in a conspiracy hatched by his son Khosrow and two of his brothers-in-law. Sources do not agree on the maternal lineage of Hormozd IV. Some have maintained that the mother of Hormozd was the daughter of the ruler of the Turk Empire, while others suggest that she was the daughter of the king of the Khazars.

Shortly before his death, Khosrow I had started negotiating a peace treaty with the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine emperor Tiberius Constantine (r. 578–582 CE) had agreed to allow the Sasanian monarchy to seize Armenia and Arzenere in exchange for Sasanian withdrawal from the Byzantine fortress city of Dara in northern Mesopotamia. After his ascension to the throne, Hormozd refused to continue with the negotiations, which could have brought peace between the two powers. Instead, by making unreasonable demands, he disrupted the peace negotiations and reignited the war with the Byzantine state, which dispatched an army against northern Mesopotamia and Media as well as the Persian capital, Ctesiphon. The war between the Sasanian and Byzantine Empires continued throughout the reign of Hormozd. A Byzantine army invaded and devastated western Iran, penetrating Sasanian territory as far east as Media. Another Roman army moved against the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. The Persians responded by attacking Roman-held possessions in Mesopotamia. They also defeated Byzantine armies in Armenia. In 585 and again in 586, the Byzantine emperor took the offensive and scored several impressive victories against Sasanian forces, but they were soon on the defensive, losing their recently gained territories and suffering heavy casualties. The war between the two powers continued until the end of Hormozd's reign. In 588/589, as the Persian and Byzantine armies fought over the control of Mesopotamia and Armenia, the Sasanian Empire was attacked by nomads from the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Hormozd IV has been criticized by Persian historians for displaying a lack of flexibility in dealing with foreign enemies and for unleashing a harsh policy of repression against the empire's ruling classes, namely the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari*, 2.724). According to these sources, Hormozd waged an attack against members of the Persian nobility and persecuted the Zoroastrian religious leadership. Many were dismissed from their posts, and some were executed by order of the Sasanian

monarch. These accounts reflect the disappointment of the Persian ruling class with Hormozd's policies, which favored the lower classes and advocated religious tolerance toward non-Zoroastrian communities of the empire (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.724). His refusal to support the Zoroastrian clergy's campaign to persecute the Christian community made him particularly unpopular among the religious establishment, while his efforts to reduce the power and influence of the nobility alienated the members of this powerful class from the king.

As already mentioned, in 588 CE the Sasanian Empire was attacked by the Khazars in northern Caucasus and by Hephthalite hordes from Central Asia. The Hephthalite invasion of Iran's northeastern frontiers was supported by the Turk state, a former ally of the Sasanian Empire, that had collaborated with Khosrow I in destroying the Hephthalite state. To neutralize the threat posed to the northeastern regions of his empire, Hormozd IV appointed Bahram Chobin, a general who hailed from the powerful Mehran family of Ray (south of modern-day Tehran) as the commander of the Sasanian armies in the east. Bahram marched quickly against the Hephthalite invaders and defeated them. A Sasanian army captured Balkh in present-day northern Afghanistan before crossing the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and inflicting a crushing defeat on a Turk army, killing the Turk ruler, the *khaqan,* and reaching Bokhara in present-day Uzbekistan.

Bahram's impressive victories aroused the jealousy of Hormozd IV, who appointed his brilliant general to the difficult task of conquering the kingdom of Lazica. Lazica was situated on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, corresponding with the western region of the present-day Republic of Georgia. The king of Lazica ruled as a vassal of the Byzantine emperor, who viewed the province as an important geographical barrier, one that denied the Persians an access route to the Black Sea. Despite his usual display of courage and bravery, Bahram suffered a defeat at the hands of the Romans. The defeat provided Hormozd IV with a convenient justification to dismiss his popular commander from his post. Disgraced and humiliated by the king's vindictive behavior, Bahram raised the flag of rebellion in 590 CE. By then, Hormozd was greatly despised by the Persian nobility for his policies, including the reduction of the salaries of army officers and the persecution of powerful members of the Persian nobility. As Bahram began to march at the head of his army against the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon in present-day southern Iraq, the king's opponents responded by staging a palace coup and removing Hormozd IV. The leaders of the coup were Bendoy and Bestam, both brothers-in-law of Hormozd who were in contact with Prince Khosrow (later Khosrow II

Parvez), who served as the Sasanian governor of Albania (present-day southern Caucasus) and carried the title "Alanshah." Hormozd IV was replaced by his son Khosrow, who had played an important role in the conspiracy to overthrow his father. Hormozd IV was first imprisoned and then blinded. He was subsequently executed by order of his own son, Khosrow II.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram VI Chobin; Khosrow II Parvez

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Jamasp

Jamasp (Zamasp) was a Persian Sasanian king who ruled from 496 to 499 CE. He ascended the throne of the Sasanian Empire in 496 CE after his brother, Kavad I, was deposed and imprisoned. Jamasp ruled for only three years before he was forced to abdicate in favor of Kavad I, who fled captivity, raised an army with assistance from the Hephthalites, and marched to regain the throne. Jamasp refused to raise an army and fight his brother.

Jamasp was one of the sons of Peroz, the Sasanian monarch who

ruled from 459 to 484 CE. Peroz lost his life fighting the Hephthalites who had invaded Sasanian territory from Central Asia in the fifth century CE. Peroz suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Hephthalites in 484 at Balkh in northern Afghanistan, where he was killed on the battlefield. The victory over the Sasanian army and the death of Peroz allowed the Hephthalites to invade northeastern Iran, forcing the Sasanians to sue for peace and pay an annual tribute. After the death of Peroz, the Persian nobility installed his good-natured and mild-mannered brother, Balash, on the throne. Balash ruled from 484 to 488 CE.

When Balash was deposed by the members of the Persian nobility in 488, a son of Peroz, Kavad, succeeded him. Kavad I was a reform-minded monarch who believed in curtailing the power of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. It is therefore not surprising that he was attracted to the teachings of Mazdak, a member of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy who preached against the greed, arrogance, and unfettered power of the country's ruling elites. According to Mazdak, the source of evil and suffering in the world was the human fixation with satisfying self-centered desires without any regard for the hardships and needs of fellow human beings. To liberate the human soul from the forces of evil and to create a just and peaceful society free of competition and violence, human beings had to abandon greed and selfishness and share the existing resources of their society, including private property and women. Mazdak's ideas and Kavad's support for them posed a direct threat to the established privileges of the ruling classes, particularly the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. This opposition was sufficiently powerful to depose and imprison Kavad I in 496.

At this juncture another son of Peroz, Jamasp, was crowned as the new king of kings. Jamasp inherited an empire in crisis. The popularity of Mazdak and his movement had grown among the masses and even among a segment of Iran's ruling elite. Tribes from the Arabian Peninsula had attacked the Sasanian Empire, and Armenians were rising up and challenging the authority of the central government. The threat of another military confrontation with the Romans loomed in the west. Finally, a widespread famine was causing massive hardship and suffering among the peasant masses. We do not know how Jamasp responded to these challenges. The limited references to him, particularly in Christian sources, described the Persian king as a calm, kind, and compassionate ruler.

Before Jamasp could consolidate his power and begin to address the problems confronting the Sasanian state, however, his deposed and jailed brother, Kavad, escaped his jailers and sought refuge with the Hephthalites. Kavad managed to convince the Hephthalites to

assist him with raising an army and regaining his throne. With support from the Hephthalites, Kavad organized an army and marched against his brother. For reasons unknown to us, Jamasp refused to fight his brother and instead relinquished the throne by abdicating in favor of him. Kavad returned to power and ruled until 531. Aside from one Nestorian Christian source, which claimed that Jamasp was executed by Kavad, other sources agree that he simply returned to a life of obscurity.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Kavad I; Peroz; *Peoples:* Hephthalites; *Prophets:* Mazdak

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Kavad I

Kavad I was a king of the Sasanian dynasty who ruled from 488 to 496 CE and again from 499 to 531 CE. He was the son of the Sasanian monarch Peroz (r. 459–484 CE), who was killed on the battlefield as he fought the Hephthalites.

The Hephthalites, a nomadic group from Central Asia, breached the eastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire in the fifth century CE. The Sasanian monarchs Bahram V (r. 421–439 CE) and Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE) tried to slow down the Hephthalite invaders by building towers to protect the northeastern provinces of the empire. Peroz, in turn, fought the Hephthalites in several campaigns. In the first battle, he was captured by the Hephthalites and forced to pay a substantial ransom for his release. In the second campaign, Peroz was defeated again. The Persian monarch was forced to leave his son, Kavad, as a hostage with the Hephthalites. In 484, to avenge the

humiliation he had suffered, Peroz attacked the Hephthalites, against the counsel of his advisers. In this confrontation the Persian king was defeated and killed on the battlefield. The victory over the Sasanian army and the death of the Persian king allowed the Hephthalites to invade eastern Iran and force the Sasanians to sue for peace and pay an annual tribute. After the death of Peroz, the Persian nobility installed his good-natured and mild-mannered brother, Balash, on the throne. Balash ruled from 484 to 488 CE.

The humiliating defeats at the hands of the Hephthalites undermined the power and legitimacy of the Sasanian state, which was also facing rebellions in Armenia, Iberia (Georgia), and among the tribal groups of the Zagros mountain range in western Iran. At the same time, the peasant masses were becoming increasingly restless and alienated from the ruling classes. Kavad I, who ascended the Sasanian throne in 488, was attracted to the idea of implementing social and economic reforms as a means of addressing and alleviating the suffering of the peasant masses. He also intended to use these reforms to increase the power of the central government and to curtail the power of the empire's ruling classes, namely the landed nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. These facts may explain why Kavad was attracted to the teachings of Mazdak, a member of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy who preached against greed, arrogance, and unfettered power.

Mazdak was a follower of a reform movement within Zoroastrianism that preached peace and justice and opposed violence and bloodshed. As a Zoroastrian leader and preacher, Mazdak believed in the relentless struggle between the forces of good, as represented by the supreme god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda), and the forces of evil, as represented by the evil spirit Ahriman (Angra Mainyu). According to his interpretation of Zoroastrianism, the triumph of good over evil required the human soul to strive for compassion, brotherhood, and equality and to refrain from wickedness, malice, competition, and conflict, as represented by greed and the drive to accumulate property and women. According to Mazdak, the source of evil and suffering in the world was the human fixation with satisfying self-centered desires without any regard for the hardships and needs of fellow human beings. To liberate the human soul from the forces of evil and to create a just and peaceful society free of competition and violence, human beings had to abandon greed and selfishness and share the existing resources of their society, including private property and women.

Mazdak's ideas and Kavad's support for them posed a direct threat to the privileges of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy. The antireform coalition was sufficiently powerful to

depose Kavad I in 496. The disgraced monarch was imprisoned, but he managed to escape his jailers and seek refuge with the Hephthalites, among whom he had lived as a hostage after his father's defeat (Tabari: 2.640–641). Kavad married the daughter of the king of the Hephthalites, and then in 499 he raised an army with support from the Hephthalites and marched against his brother Jamasp (Zamasp), who had succeeded him on the throne. Jamasp refused to fight Kavad, who regained his throne without a fight. Kavad spared Jamasp's life, but according to Procopius the dethroned king was blinded (Procopius: I.vi.17). The powerful Persian noble Goshnaspdad, who had called for the murder of Kavad, was removed from his post and subsequently executed (Procopius: I.vi.18). Kavad ascended the Sasanian throne for a second time, but he realized that his authority would not be fully secure unless he appeased the anti-Mazdak nobility and priests. The ruling dynasty was itself divided from within among the pro-Mazdak and anti-Mazdak factions. Among the contenders to the throne, Mazdak and his followers favored the older son of Kavad, Kavus, who sympathized with the ideas and objectives of their movement. The younger son, Khosrow, a fervent opponent of Mazdak, was the preferred candidate of the anti-Mazdak nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood.

Despite his many internal challenges, Kavad could not ignore the threat posed by external enemies. He was not sufficiently powerful to defeat the Hephthalites who had humiliated and killed his father. However, he could not ignore the threat posed to the Sasanian state by the Roman Empire. The conflict with Rome was centered on the control of Mesopotamia and Armenia, which were viewed by the two powers as major strategic prizes. The war between the Sasanian king of kings and the Byzantine emperor began after Kavad requested from the emperor Anastasius to lend him a sum of money so he could pay what he owed to the king of the Hephthalites (Procopius: I.vii.1). When the emperor turned down the king's request, Kavad attacked Armenia in 502, moving with rapidity, surprising the enemy, and capturing several important strategic towns. He then "unexpectedly arrived at the city Amida," present-day Diyarbakir in southeastern Turkey on the banks of the Tigris (Procopius: I.vii.3–4). After a long siege of 80 days, the city fell in 503 (Procopius: I. vii.30). While the Sasanian king was leading the military operations in the Caucasus and Asia Minor, his Arab client, No'man II, the Lakhmid ruler of Hira, was devastating Mesopotamia and laying siege to Edessa. The rapid territorial gains of Kavad and his armies forced the Romans to dispatch a large army against the Persian king. After a long campaign the Byzantine forces managed to recover Amida, but only after they agreed to pay Kavad a handsome payment. A seven-year peace

agreement was finally reached between the two powers in 506. Three decades after signing the truce with the Romans, the two powers became involved in another major war.

To secure the throne for his younger son, Khosrow, and in an effort to extend a hand of goodwill and friendship to the emperor Justin, Kavad requested that the Byzantine ruler adopt the Persian heir apparent, Khosrow, as his son (Procopius: I.xi.1–6). The request from the Persian king of kings was received with a great deal of misgiving and skepticism by the Roman emperor, who feared that the adoption of the Sasanian prince could conveniently entitle Khosrow to claim the lordship of the entire territory of the Byzantine Empire. After the death of Kavad, Khosrow would inherit the Sasanian Empire, and with the passing of Justin, Khosrow could also claim the right to rule the Roman domains, which belonged to his adopted father. The lukewarm Byzantine response to Kavad's request was used by the Persian monarch as the pretext to order the mobilization of his army for a major campaign against the Byzantine state. The confrontation between the two powers began in Lazica in present-day western Georgia. Another Persian army struck in Mesopotamia. The Sasanians were initially victorious. The Byzantine army suffered a humiliating defeat in 528. Many soldiers and officers were slaughtered, and some "were made captive" (Procopius: I.xiii.7). Sasanian forces, however, suffered a major defeat at Dara in northern Mesopotamia in 530. The Byzantine victory was short-lived. Supported and reinforced by the Arab Lakhmid forces, the Sasanian army struck back and scored an impressive victory in the spring of 531. Thus, for three years beginning in 528 and ending in 531, the Persian and Byzantine armies fought repeatedly without either side scoring a decisive victory. Throughout the war between the two powers, the Byzantine and Sasanian armies were supported by their client Arab kingdoms. When Kavad died in 531 CE, he was succeeded by his younger son, Khosrow. The tradition among the Persians called for the oldest son of the deceased king to succeed his father on the throne. Kavad's oldest son, Kavus, was, however, opposed by the powerful members of Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment, who viewed him as a supporter of Mazdak. Khosrow used this opportunity to oust Kavus and seize the Sasanian throne. The new king, who confronted numerous internal and external challenges, ended the war with the Romans and signed a peace treaty with Emperor Justinian, according to which the Persians withdrew their forces from Lazica in the Caucasus and the Romans evacuated parts of Armenia, which had been historically ruled by the Sasanians. The Romans also agreed to pay the Persian monarch 11,000 pounds of gold in return for his commitment to defend the mountain passes in the Caucasus region.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan; Peroz; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Kavad II Shiruya

Kavad II, also known as Shiruya (Shiroy), was a king of the Sasanian dynasty who ruled for several months in 628 CE. Though extremely short, Shiruya's reign proved to be a turning point for the Sasanian state. Indeed, some have maintained that the collapse of the Sasanian Empire began as a result of the reckless decisions of Shiruya.

Shiruya was one of the sons of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz), who ruled from 590 to 628 CE. During the reign of Khosrow II, the Sasanian Empire reached its largest territorial extent. Persian armies occupied much of Asia Minor as well as Syria and Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem. From Palestine, the Sasanian forces invaded and occupied Egypt. Despite repeated pleas and requests for peace, Khosrow refused to settle his disputes with Emperor Heraclius. When the Byzantine forces struck back in Armenia, the Sasanian army units disintegrated. Once again Heraclius proposed a peace treaty, and once again Khosrow rejected it. As the Byzantine forces pushed southward, they scored a major victory in Nineveh in present-day northern Iraq. By the winter of 628, the obstinate behavior of Khosrow had alienated army commanders and powerful members of the Persian nobility from their king.

On the evening of February 23, 628 CE, a group of plotters staged a coup against Khosrow. Shiruya, who was in contact with the opponents of his father, was released from detention, and a herald proclaimed him the new king of kings. The gates of the jails were also opened, and all prisoners, including Roman prisoners of war, were

allowed to escape. Khosrow II fled the palace but was eventually captured. Two days later, Shiruya ascended the throne as Kavad II. The new monarch, who had initially promised to restore peace and reverse the harsh policies of his father, initiated a bloodbath by killing all his brothers and half brothers. He then ordered the execution of his father. The Sasanian Empire never recovered from this mad rampage. Shiruy himself did not last very long on the throne. A few months after seizing the throne, he succumbed to a plague that had already devastated the western provinces of the Sasanian Empire.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Azarmidokht; Boran (Puran); Khosrow II Parvez

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Khosrow I Anushiravan

A king of the Sasanian Empire who ruled from 531 to 579 CE. Khosrow I Anushiravan is recognized as a monarch who reformed the fiscal, administrative, and military institutions of his empire. He also suppressed the popular Mazdakite movement, which demanded radical social and economic reforms. Khosrow I has been praised for defeating the Roman Empire and reestablishing the Sasanian state as the dominant power in southwest Asia. His reign was characterized by major achievements in the fields of arts, architecture, sciences, and scholarship. In recognition of his accomplishments, Khosrow I was bestowed with the title Anōshiravan (New Persian: Anushiravan), meaning "the immortal soul," and "Dadgar," meaning "the just."

No reliable historical information exists regarding the early life of Khosrow before he ascended the Sasanian throne. His father was the Sasanian monarch Kavad I. The identity of his mother is unknown. One legendary account claims that his mother was a peasant girl whom Kavad married in Abarshahr (western Khorasan) in present-day northeastern Iran after he had been deposed from the throne and

while he was fleeing his kingdom to seek refuge with the Hephthalites (Tabari: 6.641). This legend about the humble origins of the king may have been designed to generate popularity and foster an emotional bond between the king of kings and his subjects.

Khosrow was not the oldest son of his father but was favored as the successor to the throne by the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy because of his ardent opposition to the Mazdakite movement. The religious leader Mazdak advocated fundamental social and economic reforms. Mazdak's ideas were opposed by the Persian nobility, which viewed them as a direct threat to their long-established privileges. One source claims that Khosrow was designated by his father, Kavad I, as the heir to the Sasanian throne. Another historian maintains that after the death of Kavad, his oldest son, Kavus, attempted to succeed his father. Kavus was, however, opposed by the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian high priest who identified him as a supporter of Mazdak. Khosrow, on the other hand, was viewed as a defender of status quo and an ardent opponent of the Mazdakite movement. Thus, with the support of the empire's ruling elite, Khosrow defeated his brother and ascended the throne.

The new king inherited an empire bruised and battered by a sharp decline in state revenue, court intrigues, nomadic invasions from the north and east, and Roman incursions from the west. The new king, who confronted numerous internal challenges, ended the war with the Romans and signed a peace treaty with Emperor Justinian. The Persians agreed to withdraw from Lazica (present-day Georgia) in return for the Romans evacuating those parts of Armenia that had been historically ruled by the Sasanians. The Romans also agreed to pay the Persian monarch 11,000 pounds of gold in return for his commitment to defend the mountain passes in the Caucasus region. Having secured a temporary truce with the Romans, Khosrow switched his focus to the internal challenges confronting his empire, particularly the Mazdakite movement, which had commenced during the reign of his father, Kavad I. Mazdak was a follower of a reform movement within Zoroastrianism that preached peace and justice and opposed violence and bloodshed. According to his interpretation of Zoroastrianism, the triumph of good over evil required the human soul to strive for compassion, brotherhood, and equality and to refrain from wickedness, malice, competition, and conflict, as represented by greed and the drive to accumulate property. According to Mazdak, the source of evil and suffering in the world was the human fixation with satisfying self-centered desires without any regard for the hardships and needs of fellow human beings. To liberate the human soul from the forces of evil and to create a just and peaceful society free of competition and violence, human beings had to abandon greed and

selfishness and share the existing resources of their society.

Mazdak and his ideas were initially welcomed by Khosrow's father, Kavad I. The reform-minded monarch intended to use the popular movement to curtail the power and influence of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. The Persian nobility, however, responded by deposing and imprisoning Kavad in 496 CE. Kavad escaped prison and found refuge with the Hephthalites, among whom he had lived as a hostage after his father's defeat. In 499, Kavad raised an army with support from the Hephthalites and regained his throne. Kavad returned to power, but he realized that his authority would not be fully secure unless he appeased the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment, which supported Khosrow, the king's younger son.

Khosrow unleashed a campaign of terror against Mazdak and his supporters. The religious leader was denounced, detained, and executed. The murder of Mazdak, who had gained popularity among the masses, was followed by a campaign of repression. Thousands of Mazdakites were imprisoned, and many were executed. The movement was forced underground, but it did not die. Despite the harsh repression it suffered at the hands of the Sasanian state, the Mazdakite movement survived and enjoyed a revival after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the introduction of Islam in 651. Mazdakite movements resurfaced in northeastern Iran (i.e., Khorasan and Transoxiana) as well as in northwestern Iran (i.e., Azerbaijan), gaining popular support from the masses in the eighth century as well as the ninth century.

Khosrow's suppression of the Mazdakite movement made him popular among members of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. But Khosrow's strategy was not limited to repression. Adopting a carrot-and-stick approach, Khosrow also adopted an ambitious reform program that aimed at curtailing the power of the Persian nobility and increasing the power of the central government. To accomplish this, Khosrow strengthened the Persian army and expanded the size of the Sasanian bureaucracy, thereby bolstering his position vis-à-vis the provincial power centers and the large landowning families. The first and perhaps the most important of these reforms was restructuring the archaic tax system of the empire. In the traditional system, taxes were levied on the yield of land. Therefore, from year to year the amount of the tax varied. Khosrow abolished the system based on yearly variation and replaced it with a fixed sum. The Sasanian king also reorganized the administrative structure of his empire. He established a governmental system based on a council of ministers, or divan, headed by a prime minister. For much of Khosrow's reign, the wise and capable chief

minister Bozorg Mihr played a central role in running a well-oiled and highly efficient bureaucracy for his royal master. Khosrow also empowered the lower gentry or the *dihgans* (*dihqans*) and reduced the power of the great feudal families who enjoyed enormous influence in the royal court. This did not mean, however, that he attacked the power and privileges of the dominant economic classes. In fact, both Sasanian and Islamic sources emphasize that Khosrow defended and protected the division of the Iranian society into four distinct social estates, namely priests, warriors, government officials, and the members of the fourth estate, which incorporated peasants, artisans, and merchants (Minovi: 57). He intended to reverse the process of internal decline and save the traditional power structure from further decay and disintegration by introducing badly needed reforms.

An important institution reorganized by Khosrow was the Sasanian army. To centralize the decision-making process under the Sasanian monarch, the post of the supreme commander in chief (*erān espahbad* or *arteshtārān sālār*) was abolished and replaced by four commanders, or *spahbads,* responsible for the security of the eastern, western, northern, and southern regions of the empire (Tabari: 2.646). Each commander reported directly to the Sasanian king. In addition, he appointed commanders of the frontiers or margraves (*marzbāns*), who also received their orders directly from the Sasanian monarch. To boost the confidence of his forces, Khosrow improved the quality of their mounts and weapons. He also built defensive walls. One wall erected on the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea was designed to defend his northeastern borders from incursions of nomadic tribes from the Central Asian steppes. Another wall at the town of Darband (Derbent) on the western shores of the Caspian in present-day Shirvan (Republic of Daghestan) was intended to block the attacks by the Khazars and Turkic as well as Hunic tribes using the Caucasus as a corridor to penetrate Sasanian-held territory.

With his military reorganization completed, Khosrow embarked on a campaign to recover the territories lost by his grandfather, Peroz, and his father, Kavad. Under Justinian I (r. 527–565 CE), the Byzantine Empire adopted an aggressive policy vis-à-vis the Sasanian state, building fortifications in Mesopotamia and annexing Armenia. Justinian also tried to persuade the Arab Lakhmid king of Hira, a traditional ally of the Sasanians, to ally himself with the emperor and revolt against the authority of the Persian king. The historian Procopius also wrote that the Byzantine emperor established contacts with the “Huns” and encouraged them “to invade the land of the Persians and to do extensive damage to the country thereabout” (Procopius: II.i.14).

PERSIAN AND BYZANTINE INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Both the Persian Sasanian and Byzantine Empires relied on a wide and highly developed network of spies and intelligence officers. Among the reforms he introduced, the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE) expanded his spy network and raised their salaries. In his *The Secret History,* Procopius focused on the critical issue of how the Byzantine and Persian Sasanian Empires each gathered information and organized their intelligence officers. Procopius criticized the Byzantine emperor Justinian for refusing to pay for intelligence. Without an effective intelligence apparatus, the Byzantines were at a severe disadvantage. The well-paid Sasanian intelligence officers provided their rulers with vital information, while Justinian's "folly was the cause of many mistakes," leaving the Byzantines "completely in the dark as to the whereabouts of the Persian Emperor and his army."

Source: Procopius, *The Secret History,* translated by G. A. Williamson and Peter Sarris (London: Penguin, 2007), 120–122.

Khosrow responded by declaring war on Justinian and marching his army against Syria. In 540 CE, Khosrow crossed the Euphrates and attacked and captured Antioch in present-day southern Turkey. The city was plundered, and a large segment of its population was forced to resettle in the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. The Romans responded by attacking northern Mesopotamia and Armenia. The conflict between the two empires dragged on for several years before Khosrow and Justinian agreed to a truce. The emperor agreed to pay Khosrow 2,000 pounds of gold, and in return the Persian monarch released the Roman soldiers and officers who had been captured by Sasanian forces. Khosrow also managed to secure his rule over Lazica, a vassal kingdom on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, whose territory corresponded with the present-day Republic of Georgia and parts of northeastern Turkey. Their truce, however, proved to be short-lived. Khosrow accused Justinian of violating the agreement when he attacked Lazica. Once again, conflict erupted between the two empires. As in the past, Mesopotamia and Armenia were devastated as armies clashed. The wars between the two powers forced the Arab kingdoms of the region to take sides with the Lakhmids remaining loyal to the Sasanian king and the Ghassanids allying themselves with Justinian. When the war finally ended the Persian Sasanians had triumphed, forcing the Byzantine emperor to pay 400 pounds of gold annually. According to a new peace treaty, which was signed in 562, the Sasanians agreed to guard and protect the Caucasus region from the invading Huns, Alans, and other nomadic groups who posed a direct threat to the eastern frontiers of the Byzantine Empire. The emperor promised not to violate the peace agreement by sending his armies against Persian-held possessions in

Mesopotamia and the Caucasus.

Though he was preoccupied for much of his reign with his wars against the Byzantine state in the west, Khosrow also was actively involved in expanding Persian power and influence elsewhere. It was during Khosrow's reign that Sasanian forces conquered Yemen in the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. The conquest of Yemen allowed the Sasanians to impose their supremacy over the sea routes linking the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. In the northeast, the principal target of the Sasanian monarch was the Hephthalite Empire. The Hephthalites had defeated and humiliated Sasanian armies in the second half of the fifth century CE, killing Khosrow's grandfather, Peroz, on the battlefield and holding his father, Kavad, as a hostage. Khosrow was well aware that the northern Hephthalites based in Sogdiana, or the territory lying between the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr Darya), were under pressure from the Turk state, which had created a vast empire extending from Mongolia to the Aral Sea. This provided an opportunity for Khosrow to enter into an alliance with the Turks. In a series of campaigns from 560 to 563, the rejuvenated Sasanian forces defeated the Hephthalites and put an end to their rule. The Persian monarch achieved this victory with significant support and assistance from the Turk Empire, which had imposed its political and military domination over much of Central Asia. The emperor of the Western Turk Empire, Ishtemi (553–?), attacked from the north, capturing Chach (present-day Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan), crossing the Syr Darya, and defeating the main Hephthalite army near Bokhara in present-day Uzbekistan, forcing it to retreat southward. The Sasanian army, however, had occupied the region south of the Oxus River (Amu Darya), and the Hephthalites did not have any other alternative but to accept Sasanian suzerainty. Squeezed between the Turk Empire to the north and the Sasanian state to the south, the Hephthalite Empire disintegrated after nearly 100 years of dominating the southern regions of Central Asia along with the territory corresponding with present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northwestern India. According to Tabari, the defeat and collapse of the Hephthalite state allowed the Sasanians to recover Tokharestan (formerly Bactria) in northern Afghanistan, Kabulestan in central Afghanistan, Zabolestan in eastern Iran, and Gandhara in present-day northwestern Pakistan (Tabari: 2.646).

Throughout his reign, Khosrow I acted as a great patron of arts and sciences. He exhibited a genuine interest in philosophical and religious issues. In 529 CE, the Academy of Athens, "which had been the world's greatest center for philosophical inquiry for a thousand years," was shut down by the Byzantine emperor Justinian as part of his "imperial ban against pagan education" (Rosen: 236). Khosrow

seized on this opportunity and recruited seven members of the academy's faculty "to re-create the academy at the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon, there to translate the works of Plato and his successors into Persian" (Rosen: 236). Though Byzantine historians such as Agathias expressed hostility and disdain for the Sasanian monarch and his philosophical sophistication, other sources praised Khosrow I for his wisdom and prudence. John of Ephesus wrote that Khosrow "was a prudent and wise man, and all his lifetime took pains to collect the religious books of all creeds, and read and studied them, that he might learn which were true and wise and which were foolish" (Rosen: 251). He also wrote that Khosrow "esteemed the Christian Bible above other books calling it true and wise above any other religion" (Rosen: 251).

Khosrow I also expanded and strengthened the prestigious medical school at Gondishapur, which emerged as one of the world's most important centers of learning, training, and research in late antiquity. Located in Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan, the city of Gondishapur was founded by the Persian Sasanian monarch Shapur I. During the reign of Shapur II, the city emerged as one of the most prosperous urban centers of the Sasanian Empire. Shapur built a medical center in the city that included a major library. During the reign of Khosrow, a hospital was added to the medical complex. At this hospital, Greek, Indian, and Persian physicians attended to the needs of the sick. Meanwhile, the medical school offered courses in medicine, anatomy, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, and theology. Students and trainees were required to pass an examination before graduating from the school. It has been suggested that Khosrow sent the eminent physician Borzuye to India to study Indian sciences and healing techniques and recruit Indian physicians to teach at the medical school in Gondishapur. Borzuye returned from India with a large collection of scientific books, which were translated into Middle Persian. Borzuye also brought back the game of chess and numerous herbal plants from his trip to India.

Historians of the Islamic era celebrated Khosrow as the greatest of all Persian kings, crediting him with building numerous bridges, roads, dams, etc. His most impressive accomplishment was the magnificent palace he built at the city of Ctesiphon near Baghdad in present-day southern Iraq. The palace and its gigantic arch, known as Taq-e Kasra or the Archway of Khosrow, is a monument to the brilliance of Sasanian architects and engineers who designed one of the most impressive structures of the world during late antiquity. Taq-e Kasra, built with baked bricks, stands 93 feet (28.4 meters) high and 84 feet (25.5 meters) wide. It was the largest single-span vault of unreinforced brick in the world. The city of Ctesiphon was sacked by Arab Muslims after they attacked the Persian Sasanian Empire in 636

CE. The palace of Khosrow was looted and destroyed by the invading Arabs. The grandeur of Khosrow's court, the brilliance of his policies, and his commitment to fairness and justice, however, survived in numerous stories and fables, providing a model of benevolent and efficient administration for future dynasties, including the Abbasids, the Ottomans, and the Safavids.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Hormozd IV; Kavad I; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire; *Prophets:* Mazdak; Primary Documents: Document 34

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Khosrow II Parvez

Khosrow II Parvez (the Victorious) was the ruler of the Persian Sasanian Empire from 590 to 628 CE. He was the son of the Sasanian monarch Hormozd IV (r. 579–590 CE) and the grandson of Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE). Through his paternal grandmother, Kayen, Khosrow II was the great-grandson of the *khagan* of the Hephthalites. Khosrow's mother was from the powerful and influential landowning family of Espahbadh.

Khosrow II was born around 570 CE. As a young man he served his father as the governor of Albania in the southern Caucasus. Whether the young prince played any role in his father's military campaigns as

the Sasanian armies fought the Romans to the west and the Turks to the northeast is not clear. The campaign against the Romans did not result in a victory, but the Persians were victorious in their war against the Turks. The Persian commander Bahram Chobin (Chubin), who hailed from the powerful Mehran family, inflicted a devastating defeat on the Turk Empire, reestablishing Sasanian control over northern Afghanistan and the southern regions of Central Asia. Instead of recognizing the brilliance of his general and acknowledging his impressive victories, Hormozd sent an insulting message, which angered and alienated Bahram from his royal master. The victories of Bahram on the battlefield had aroused the jealousy of Hormozd IV, who appointed his brilliant general to the difficult task of conquering the kingdom of Lazica. Lazica was situated on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, corresponding with the western region of the present-day Republic of Georgia. The king of Lazica ruled as a vassal of the Byzantine emperor, who viewed the province as an important geographical barrier, one that denied the Persians an access route to the Black Sea. Despite his usual display of courage and bravery, Bahram suffered defeat at the hands of the Romans. The defeat provided Hormozd IV with the convenient justification to dismiss his charismatic commander from his post. Humiliated by the king's decision, Bahram rose in rebellion against his royal master, who had become increasingly unpopular among the ruling elite because he had cut the salaries paid to army officers and executed powerful members of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy.

With support from his army, Bahram began to march to Azerbaijan and from there southward toward Media and the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, in present-day southern Iraq. As Bahram's rebellion gained momentum, a group of court dignitaries, including the two maternal uncles of Khosrow, Bendoy and Bestam, staged a revolt and removed Hormozd IV from the throne. The humiliated king was detained and shortly thereafter blinded. Khosrow, who was apparently in Azerbaijan at the time of the palace coup, rushed to the capital and ascended the throne in June 590 CE. The new king tried to diffuse Bahram's rebellion through diplomacy but failed. Recognizing the superiority of Bahram's forces, Khosrow, together with his wives, maternal uncles, and a small number of supporters, fled the Sasanian capital and sought refuge in Roman territory. The Persian king appealed for military assistance from the Roman emperor Maurice (r. 582–602 CE). With Khosrow temporarily gone from the scene, Bahram entered the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. He was crowned the king of kings in March 591.

Bahram's reign, however, was short-lived. In return for promising the Byzantine state significant territorial concessions in Mesopotamia

and the Caucasus, Khosrow secured military support from Emperor Maurice. Khosrow's uncles also mobilized additional loyal units in Azerbaijan. In a multipronged campaign, Khosrow and his commanders marched against Bahram and defeated him at Ganzak, near Lake Orumiyeh in present-day northwestern Iran. Bahram fled the battlefield and sought refuge with the Turks in Central Asia, where he was murdered by Khosrow's agents.

Khosrow's first priority was to consolidate his power within the Sasanian state. He therefore adopted a conciliatory policy toward Iran's traditional enemies, particularly the Byzantine Empire. This foreign policy of peaceful coexistence and cooperation allowed him to eliminate powerful and ambitious courtiers and consolidate power in his own hands. Five years after he had regained the throne, Khosrow arrested and executed all the nobles and courtiers who had played a role in overthrowing his father. Among them was his maternal uncle Bendoy, who was detained and executed in Ctesiphon. Khosrow's other uncle, Bestam, fled to the Caspian province of Gilan, where he organized a rebellion against his nephew. Bestam's revolt was finally suppressed after he was murdered in 600/601. By the end of 601 and the beginning of 602, Khosrow had emerged as the uncontested ruler of the Sasanian Empire.

Equestrian relief of the Sasanian king of kings Khosrow II Parvez (the Victorious) with his favorite horse, Shabdiz, inside a large grotto, or *ivan*, at Taq-e Bostan near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. The Sasanian Empire reached its greatest territorial expansion during the reign of Khosrow II, who captured the city of Jerusalem before conquering Egypt. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

Khosrow's long reign was marked by a series of military campaigns, including one that would stretch the borders of Sasanian rule farther westward than at any time since the reign of the Achaemenid Empire. Khosrow embarked on the first of these in 602, when he began a campaign to destroy the Arab Lakhmid monarchy in southern Mesopotamia. Since the third century CE, the Lakhmid rulers had functioned as clients of the Sasanian kings, protecting the Persian state from raids by Arab tribes from the south. The reasons behind Khosrow's decision to attack, imprison, and execute the Christian Nestorian Lakhmid ruler No'man III (r. 580–602 CE) are unclear, but one consequence of Khosrow's policy was a fundamental change in the balance of power among Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula and the removal of a buffer state that had protected the southern borders of the Sasanian state. Although Khosrow replaced the Lakhmid ruler with the chief of the Tayy tribe, new tribal alliances began to pose a threat to the Sasanian state. In the Battle of Dhi Qar in 604, an Arab tribal army defeated the Sasanians and their Arab allies.

In 602, the relationship between the Sasanian and Byzantine Empires, which had remained peaceful for over a decade, broke down. The conflict originated from the overthrow and assassination of

Emperor Maurice and five of his sons by a group of rebels who subsequently crowned an army officer, Phocas, as the new ruler. Maurice's oldest son and co-regent, Theodosius, fled to Sasanian territory and pleaded for support from Khosrow II. Theodosius was now in the same situation Khosrow had encountered between 590 and 591 as he fought Bahram Chobin to retain his throne. The Persian king could not have forgotten the generosity and support he had received from Emperor Maurice in 590, when he assisted the young and dethroned Persian king by organizing an army that defeated Bahram and allowed Khosrow to regain his throne. As with Maurice 11 years before, Khosrow welcomed Theodosius with open arms. Theodosius was coronated in the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, as the new Roman emperor.

By 603, the Persian armies were prepared to attack Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. The Sasanian forces quickly marched to upper Mesopotamia and laid siege to the well-fortified Byzantine fortress of Dara, which was finally captured a year and a half later in 604. Another Sasanian army attacked Byzantine forces in Armenia and, after suffering heavy losses, managed to defeat them. Thus, the first successful campaign against the Romans came to an end in 605. Khosrow II, however, remained dissatisfied with his territorial gains. In 607 the Sasanian armies struck again, this time seizing Theodosiopolis (present-day Ra's al-Ayn in northern Syria on the border with Turkey) in 608 and the important city of Edessa (modern-day Urfa) in present-day southeastern Turkey in 609. In 611, Khosrow took advantage of the internal conflict in Byzantium and captured Caesarea (modern-day Kayseri) in the central Anatolian region of Cappadocia (present-day Kapadokya in central Turkey). In 611 the new emperor, Heraclius (r. 610–641 CE), sent a delegation to the Sasanian court, but Khosrow refused to recognize Heraclius as the legitimate Byzantine ruler and ordered the execution of his ambassadors. Meanwhile, the Sasanian forces continued with their attack on Syria. They quickly seized Antioch (modern-day Antakya in southern Turkey on the country's border with Syria) and shortly thereafter reached the Mediterranean coast in 612. A year later in 613, Persian forces defeated a Byzantine army led by Heraclius and occupied Syria and Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem. The victorious Persians seized the True Cross of Christian tradition and transported it back to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon in 614. To the north, the Sasanian armies moved from Cappadocia and quickly reached the Asian shores of the Bosporus in 614. Byzantium, the capital of the powerful East Roman Empire, was now within their sight. Since the time of the Persian Achaemenid Empire no Iranian ruler had extended the borders of his empire so far westward. At this

point, a second Byzantine embassy arrived in the Sasanian court and pleaded for peace. Emperor Heraclius likewise arrived in the Persian camp with a plea for negotiations. Khosrow, however, rejected a peace settlement.

In 615 Khosrow was forced to switch his focus from the west to the east, where a combined Kushan and Turkish army attacked Khorasan and defeated the Sasanian forces under the command of the Armenian general Smbat Bagratuni. The victorious Kushan–Turk army raided Iranian urban centers as far west as Isfahan and Ray, south of modern-day Tehran. In 616 the Sasanians organized a counterattack, and an army, again under the command of Bagratuni, fought and defeated a Kushan–Hephthalite force in Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan).

With the threat to their eastern borders checked, the Persian armies went back on the offensive in Asia Minor in 617. A year later in 618, Khosrow deployed his forces in Palestine with the goal of attacking Egypt. His invasion of Egypt succeeded, and the port city of Alexandria was captured in 619. Within a year, the Persian conquest of Egypt was completed. The fall of Egypt allowed Khosrow to concentrate his main forces in Asia Minor and attack the heartland of the Byzantine state and eventually its capital. To ensure the success of this campaign, Khosrow formed an alliance with the Avars, who were breaching Byzantine defense lines in the Balkans. When the Persian forces attacked Asia Minor in 622, they advanced rapidly. By 623 they had reached Ancyra (modern-day Ankara, the capital of Turkey), while the Persian naval forces seized the island of Rhodes and several other islands in the eastern Aegean Sea. At this historic juncture, Emperor Heraclius organized a counterattack and surprised the Persians with a swift and determined march against eastern Asia Minor and western Iran. As Khosrow's army disintegrated and the Persian king fled, Heraclius entered Azerbaijan. He reached the important Zoroastrian temple at Shiz, which housed Adur Gushnasp (Azar Goshnasp), one of the three sacred fires of Sasanian Iran, and destroyed it. Heraclius also managed to form an alliance with the Turkish Khaganate, which agreed to join the emperor in a campaign of devastation. Though defeated, the Persian commanders fought back and forced Heraclius and his army to move out of Azerbaijan and into the southern Caucasus. Under relentless attack from Sasanian forces, Heraclius retreated to eastern Asia Minor. Determined to drive the Byzantine forces out of eastern Asia Minor, the Persian armies, under the command of the Sasanian general Shahrbaraz, attacked the enemy forces in southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria, forcing them to retreat. Shahrbaraz then continued with his westward march, targeting the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, which he reached in

the summer of 626.

The two battles fought in the summer of 626 proved devastating for the Sasanians and sealed the fate of Khosrow and his armies. The first confrontation in northern Asia Minor resulted in a humiliating defeat for the Persian side when a Byzantine army, led by Emperor Heraclius, defeated a Persian army, under the command of the Sasanian general Shahen. In the second confrontation, outside Constantinople in August 626, a Persian army supported by a large Avar force was routed by Byzantine forces. The Persian commander Shahrbaraz did not have any other option but to withdraw from his position on the Asian shore of the Bosporus. As the Persian armies suffered significant losses, an army of Turks allied with the Byzantine emperor invaded, devastating urban and rural communities in Albania and Azerbaijan.

Although the Sasanian forces already suffered significant losses in 626, the year 627 proved to be disastrous. A massive Turkish invasion from the north devastated the Caucasus region. The strategic town of Darband as well as the town of Partaw, the capital of Albania (Iranian Arran), were overrun. A Byzantine army led by Emperor Heraclius also entered Iberia (present-day Republic of Georgia). The Roman emperor and the Turkish *khagan* met near the Iberian capital of Tbilisi to reaffirm their alliance. As winter approached, the Turks returned home to the Eurasian steppes, while a Byzantine army pushed southward toward Azerbaijan, southeast Asia Minor, and finally northern Iraq where, in the Battle of Nineveh, it defeated the Persian army that had been sent to block Heraclius's advance against the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon.

Twenty-four years of incessant warfare had exhausted the Persian society, economy, and armed forces. Outraged by Khosrow's setbacks, a group of army officers joined by sons of several prominent families organized a plot to overthrow the king and replace him with his son Kavad Shiruya (Shiroy). Shiruya joined the plot against his father because he feared that his half brother Mardanshah, the son of Khosrow's favorite wife, Shirin, had been designated as the king's successor. The coup organizers established contact with Emperor Heraclius as well as with Persian army commanders. On the evening of February 23, 628, the plotters carried out their coup against Khosrow. Shiruy was released from detention, and a herald proclaimed him the king of kings. The gates of the jails were also opened, and all prisoners, including Roman prisoners, were allowed to escape. Khosrow fled the palace but was later captured. Two days later, his son Shiruy ascended the throne as Kavad II. The new monarch, who had initially promised to restore peace and reverse the harsh policies of his father, unleashed a campaign of terror, murdering

all his brothers and half brothers. He then ordered the execution of his father, Khosrow. The Sasanian Empire would never recover from this mad rampage of its new king.

Throughout his reign, Khosrow displayed a high level of religious tolerance. He allowed Christian communities, particularly the Nestorian Christians, as well as the Jews to practice their religions freely. The king's most powerful and famous wife, Shirin, was a Nestorian Christian. Within this general policy of toleration shown toward both Jews and Christians of all denominations and despite the strains introduced into the body politic and the economy by 24 years of war, even as the war approached its climax Sasanian Persia remained a multiethnic, multireligious, and multilinguistic society.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Hormozd IV; Kavad II Shiruya

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Narseh

Narseh was a king of the Sasanian dynasty who ruled from 293 to 302 CE. He seized power after the Sasanian monarch Bahram III was deposed. After the Persian Sasanian monarch Bahram II died in 293 CE, his son, Bahram III, ascended the throne as the new king of kings. Bahram III enjoyed the support of a group of court dignitaries, led by a certain Wahnam. However, powerful members of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy, including the powerful high priest Kartir, supported Narseh, one of the sons of Shapur I, the second king of the Sasanian dynasty, who at the time ruled Armenia. Before being appointed as the "King of Armenia," Narseh had served as the ruler of Sistan with the title of Sakan Shah.

Bas-relief at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars in southern Iran shows the investiture of the Sasanian king of kings Narseh. A son of the Sasanian monarch Shapur I, Narseh served as the king of Armenia before seizing power in 293. (DeAgostini/Getty

Images)

Having rejected Bahram III as the legitimate heir to his father, the powerful dignitaries who favored Narseh invited him to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. Before reaching the Persian capital, however, Narseh met with his supporters at Paikuli in present-day northern Iraq near the country's border with Iran. An inscription at Paikuli in Parthian and Middle Persian describes how Narseh seized the Sasanian throne from Bahram III. The inscription has three parts: introduction, main text, and conclusion. The main text also can be divided into three parts. The first part is an account of the events that took place before Narseh and the Persian dignitaries met at Paikuli, the second part is an account of the events leading to the surrender of Bahram III and the punishment of Wahnam, and the third part covers the negotiations between Narseh and the dignitaries regarding his succession to the Sasanian throne.

Once he had seized Ctesiphon, Narseh ordered the execution of Wahnam, the power behind Bahram's throne. Soon after Narseh ascended the Sasanian throne, disputes over Armenia resulted in another war with Rome. In 296 CE, Tiridates, the Arsacid king of Armenia, invaded the northwestern provinces of the Sasanian Empire with support from Rome. The Sasanians responded by sending an army, which repelled the Armenians and regained the upper hand, pushing into eastern Asia Minor. Romans reacted by invading Mesopotamia, which Narseh had occupied hoping to check the enemy's advance. The two powers fought three battles. While the first two battles were inconclusive, in the third confrontation at Callinicum in Syria, the Romans under the command of Galerius suffered a devastating defeat and were forced to cross the Euphrates and retreat to Antioch. Having reorganized their forces, Galerius attacked Armenia again in 297. In 298 the Romans surprised Narseh and inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Persians near Satala in eastern Asia Minor. Narseh fled to safety, but his harem, including his queen, his sisters, and several of his children, were captured by the Romans. With the Sasanian army in disarray and the victorious Romans advancing toward his capital, Narseh was forced to sign a humiliating peace treaty with Rome. According to this treaty, the Sasanian king ceded five provinces in Mesopotamia to the Romans. Tiridates was reinstated as the ruler of Armenia under Roman suzerainty. The Sasanian monarch also agreed to renounce his claims on Iberia (present-day Republic of Georgia) in the Caucasus, which emerged as a Roman protectorate. The Tigris River was established as the boundary between the two powers. The town of Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey on the border with northern Syria was designated as the only center for trade and commerce between Sasanian Iran and

Rome. This allowed the Romans to tax the Iranian merchants directly. Narseh never recovered from the defeat he had suffered at the hands of the Romans. He died in 302 CE.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III; Hormozd III; *Prophets:* Kartir

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Peroz

Persian king of kings who ruled the Sasanian Empire from 459 to 484 CE. When the Sasanian monarch Yazdegerd II died in 457, a battle for succession erupted between his two sons. At Ray, south of present-day Tehran, the older son, Hormozd, ascended the Sasanian throne, while the younger son, Peroz, fled to the eastern province of Khorasan to raise an army with assistance from the Hephthalites based in Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan). Meanwhile, Denag (Dinak), the mother of Hormozd and Peroz, was ruling the empire from its capital at Ctesiphon, in present-day southern Iraq (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.628). The reign of Hormozd III proved to be short-lived. In 459 Peroz attacked Hormozd and defeated his brother, seizing the Sasanian throne and proclaiming himself the king of kings.

The reign of Peroz began with a devastating drought that lasted for seven years. Rivers, springs, water wells, and underground irrigation systems dried up (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 6.629). The drought significantly diminished water levels even in the Tigris River. Cattle

and other livestock and farm animals perished. Famine spread across the empire, and rural communities began to suffer from starvation. Having secured the throne, Peroz tried to relieve the pain and suffering of his people by temporarily halting collection of taxes by the central government. He also ordered all storehouses and pantries to open their doors and distribute their food reserves among the suffering populace. Peroz threatened that if he ever received news of one single individual dying in a city or a village from starvation, he would punish that community with the full force of the law. The gallant efforts of the Sasanian monarch paid off. According to the historian Tabari, despite enormous hardship and suffering brought about by the drought and famine, with the sole exception of a single village in the province of Fars, no one else suffered (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.629–630). Though he was forced to focus on the devastating impact of the drought and famine on his subjects, Peroz could not ignore the threats posed by internal rebellions and foreign invasions, particularly by nomads penetrating the eastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire.

The Persian king first led his forces to Albania, which had declared its independence from the Sasanian state. The territory of Albania corresponded with Iranian Arran and the present-day republic of Azerbaijan in the southern Caucasus region north of the Aras River. The Sasanian army suppressed the rebellion. Though he had reestablished Persian rule over the region, Peroz adopted a tolerant policy vis-à-vis the non-Zoroastrian communities, particularly the Armenian and Albanian Christians. He switched his focus from the Caucasus to the empire's eastern provinces, which had been invaded by the Hephthalites. His campaigns against the Hephthalites brought the Sasanian state to the verge of extinction. The Hephthalites, who were called White Huns, had breached the eastern frontiers of the Sasanian state, particularly Tokharestan (ancient Bactria), which corresponded with today's northern Afghanistan (Procopius: I.ii.1). The campaigns of Peroz against the Hephthalites, who had supported him in his campaign to seize the Sasanian throne, proved to be disastrous for the Persian monarch and the Sasanian Empire. In the first campaign the Sasanian army suffered a humiliating defeat, and Peroz was captured. The Persian king was released after he agreed to pay a substantial ransom. To avenge the humiliation he had suffered, Peroz attacked the Hephthalites for a second time. Once again the Persian monarch was defeated. This time, he could not pay the heavy ransom demanded from the Hephthalites. As a compromise, he was forced to leave his son Kavad, a daughter, and the chief Zoroastrian priest as hostages with the Hephthalites. But Peroz refused to accept defeat. He therefore organized a third campaign and, against the

advice of the members of the Persian nobility at court, attacked the Hephthalites for a third time in 484. Once again, the Sasanian army suffered a humiliating defeat. Peroz and several of his sons were killed on the battlefield (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.628). The entire Sasanian royal harem, including all of the king's wives and one of his daughters, as well as the chief Zoroastrian priest, were captured by the Hephthalites. The death of the Persian king and the disintegration of his formidable army enabled the Hephthalites to invade and occupy the eastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanians had no other alternative but to sue for peace and agree to pay an annual tribute.

The relegation of the Sasanian Empire from a superpower to a tributary state of the Hephthalite Empire was one of the lowest points in Sasanian history. The growing weakness of the Sasanian central government allowed the powerful members of the Persian nobility to reemerge and interfere in the decision-making process at the royal court. Historical sources mention Zarmehr Sokhra, of the Karen family, who fought the Hephthalites courageously after the death of Peroz on the battlefield and saved the Sasanian army from total annihilation at the hands of the enemy. Mention has also been made of Shapur, a member of the powerful Mehran family, who blamed Peroz for his tyrannical behavior and his refusal to consult the nobility before embarking on adventurous military campaigns. When a son of Peroz, Zarer, attempted to seize the throne after his father's death, the powerful members of the nobility murdered him and instead installed Balash (Valakhsh), a brother of Peroz, on the throne. Balash, who has been described as a mild-mannered and peace-loving king, displayed his benevolence toward his Christian subjects by allowing them to practice their religion without fear of persecution. Despite his best efforts to restore peace and tranquility in his empire, however, the Sasanian state remained in dire straits. The treasury loomed empty, and the king of kings could not pay the salaries of his troops. Once again Zarmehr Sokhra and Shapur acted as the king makers, deposing Balash and passing the throne to Kavad, "the youngest son of Peroz," who for a time had been a hostage with the Hephthalites (Procopius: I.iv.34–35).

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Balash; Kavad I; Yazdegerd II

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Shapur I

Shapur I was the second monarch of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who ruled from 239/240/241/242 to 270/272 CE. He was the son of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian state. Ardashir defeated and killed Artabanus IV, the last king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty, on the battlefield in 224 CE. Shapur was chosen by his father as co-regent either in 239 or 240 CE, and after Ardashir I died, Shapur emerged as the sole master of a vast empire, which by then stretched from Central Asia to Syria. The first years of Shapur's reign were spent on consolidating his rule and suppressing the internal rebellions against the Sasanian central government. Once he had completed these campaigns, Shapur shifted his focus to the west and the threat posed by the Roman Empire. Ardashir I had already adopted an offensive posture toward the Romans by invading and occupying several key urban centers in Mesopotamia. Before Ardashir's death, the Romans organized a large army under the command of Gordian III (r. 238–244 CE) to recapture the territory they had lost in Mesopotamia. In 243, Gordian succeeded in reestablishing Roman rule over Antioch, Nisibis (Nusaybin), and Carrhae (Harran) in present-day southeastern Turkey. He then moved south toward Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital located in present-day southern Iraq. When the battle was joined at Misiche or Massice in Mesopotamia in 244 CE, the Sasanians defeated the Romans and forced them to withdraw their forces. The Roman emperor Gordian either died on the battlefield or was murdered by his own officers shortly after the conclusion of the battle. Gordian was succeeded by Philip the Arab (r. 244–249 CE). The new Roman emperor negotiated a peace treaty with Shapur I. Philip ceded Armenia and Mesopotamia to Shapur. He also paid a large indemnity of 500,000 gold dinarii to the Persian king. After this victory, Misiche was renamed "Pēroz Shāpur" ("Victorious Is Shapur") (Frye: 296). Hostilities between the two empires resumed, however, when the Romans reneged on their promises and intervened in Armenia. In 256 CE, the Sasanian army defeated a 60,000-strong Roman army at Barbalissos in northern Syria. Soon Antioch fell, followed by Dura

Europos on the right bank of the Euphrates River in eastern Syria. The Sasanian monarch ravaged Syria before returning home.

Monumental statue of the Sasanian king of kings Shapur I stands in the Cave of Shapur a short distance from the ancient city of Bishapur in southern Iran. Shapur claimed that he had defeated three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. (Ivan Vdovin/JAI/Corbis)

Humiliated by the defeats they had suffered at the hands of Shapur and determined to recapture the territory they had lost, the Romans attacked again during the reign of the Roman emperor Valerian (r. 253–260 CE) with an army of 70,000. After seizing Edessa in present-day southeastern Turkey, Shapur led the Sasanian army against the Romans. Emperor Valerian and a group of Roman commanders, senators, and engineers were captured by the Persian king. Several scholars have rejected the claim made by Shapur in his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran that he captured the Roman emperor on the battlefield, maintaining that Valerian was most probably seized

by deceit. Once again, the disintegration of the Roman army allowed Shapur to attack and devastate Syria, northern Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. Major urban centers of the region, including Antioch, Edessa, Konya, and Caesarea, were raided and plundered. Sasanians were, however, surprised when the ruler of the important commercial city of Palmyra, who had remained loyal to the Romans, struck, attacking Persian forces and capturing Nisibis. It is generally believed that many Romans captured by Shapur were sent to Fars in southern Iran, where they participated in the construction of the city of Bishapur. Valerian never saw Rome again and died in captivity in Iran.

Three rock reliefs at Bishapur celebrated Shapur's victories over the Romans. The first, which is a scene of investiture, depicts the Sasanian monarch sitting on his horse and receiving a diadem from the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda), who is also mounted. Ohrmazd's horse has trampled a figure under its hooves. This figure has been identified as the demonic Ahriman, the evil spirit in Zoroastrian religious teachings. As with Ohrmazd, Shapur has also crushed a figure under the hooves of his horse. This figure has been identified by some scholars as the Roman emperor Gordian III. Meanwhile, a figure believed by some to be Philip the Arab kneels in front of the Persian monarch in a display of submission and obedience. The second rock relief shows Shapur receiving the diadem not from God but from a putto, a nude, winged, male child. In the same relief, a figure believed by some to be the Roman emperor Gordian has been trampled under the hooves of the king's horse, while another figure, probably Philip the Arab, kneels, and the Sasanian king holds the ill-fated Emperor Valerian by his wrist. The third relief shows a mounted Shapur who has trampled a figure, probably Gordian III, under the hooves of his horse. The Sasanian monarch holds Emperor Valerian by his wrist, while Philip the Arab kneels. The new element added to the third relief is the depiction of a group of horsemen and court dignitaries in two side registers. Another rock relief, this one at Naqsh-e Rostam, also in southern Iran, celebrated the Persian victory and depicted the defeated Valerian kneeling in front of the Persian king, who sits on his horse.

It was during Shapur's reign, around 242 CE, that the Iranian prophet Mani visited the Sasanian court. Mani dedicated one of his books, *Shapurakan* [Book of Shapur], to the Persian monarch. Shapur I granted Mani the right to preach in the provinces of the Sasanian Empire. Some have suggested that Mani tried to convert Shapur to his religion but failed, although Manichean sources claimed that the Iranian prophet did convert a brother of Shapur, Mihrshah, to the new religion (Frye: 300). The decision of the Sasanian king to allow Mani to preach his religion without fear of persecution may indicate that

the Zoroastrian priesthood did not enjoy sufficient power over the Sasanian dynast to prevent competing religious doctrines and movements from carrying out their missionary activities within the Sasanian domains. Shapur I died most probably in 270 or 272 CE and was succeeded by his son Hormozd Ardashir, who ascended the Sasanian throne as Hormozd I. Hormozd, who was not the oldest son of Shapur, had previously served his father as the king of Armenia.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Shapur II

Shapur II was the longest-reigning monarch of the Sasanian Persian dynasty who ruled from 309 to 379 CE. He was the son of Hormozd II. Hormozd II ruled from 302 to 309 CE. When Hormozd died, the Persian nobles and court dignitaries refused to support any of his living sons as the next king of kings. Instead, they placed the crown on the swollen abdomen of one of Hormozd's wives, who was pregnant at the time, and declared her unborn child the successor to the deceased king. Thus, Shapur II was designated as the ruler of the Sasanian

Empire before he was even born.

For the first 16 years of his reign, the real power rested in the hands of the Persian nobility who dominated the Sasanian court. At the age of 16, however, Shapur II assumed the reins of power. The young monarch began his reign by organizing a campaign against Arab tribesmen who had invaded the southern and southwestern provinces of the Sasanian Empire, raiding cities and towns and disrupting agricultural production in many rural communities. His harsh suppression of the Arabs earned him the title Dhul-aktaf (Piercer of Shoulders). To prevent any future attacks from nomadic Arabs, Shapur ordered the construction of a large moat near Hira in today's southern Iraq, a short distance from the city of Najaf. He then shifted his attention from the southern borders of his empire to Central Asia, where a Hunnic people called the Chionites were threatening the eastern provinces of the Sasanian state. After several military campaigns between 353 and 358 CE, Shapur pacified the Chionites and formed an alliance with their king, who agreed to join the Persian monarch in his campaigns against the Romans.

Much of Shapur II's reign was spent in wars against Roman armies. His principal objective was to revoke the humiliating Peace of Nisibis, which the Sasanian monarch Narseh had signed with the Romans in 298/299. The treaty changed the border between the Roman and Persian Empires from the Euphrates River to the Tigris River and permitted the Romans to restore their power in Armenia, which was allowed to gain territory in Media. For 27 years Shapur II "fought numerous pitched battles with the Romans, and was never once defeated…. By a combination of courage, perseverance, and promptness, he brought the entire contest to a favorable issue, and restored Persia, in 363 CE, to a higher position than that from which she had descended two generations earlier" (Rawlinson: 239–240). Shapur II was determined to regain the five provinces that the Sasanian monarch Narseh had lost to the Romans. Shapur had other reasons as well for his campaigns to defeat the Romans. The Roman emperor Constantine had proclaimed Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. He had also appointed himself as the protector of all Christians in the world, including those in the Sasanian domains. Additionally, the Romans were trying to interfere in the internal affairs of the Sasanian state and undermine Shapur's authority by supporting a Sasanian prince named Hormozd, who had sought refuge in the Roman court.

Rock relief at Taq-e Bostan near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran depicts the Sasanian monarch Shapur II standing next to his son Shapur III. As the longest-reigning Sasanian monarch (ruled 309–379 CE), Shapur II punished the Arabs who had raided Fars and Khuzistan and inflicted several humiliating defeats on Roman armies, killing the Roman emperor Julian in 363 and forcing Julian's successor Jovian to return the five provinces east of the Tigris River that the Sasanian king Narseh had lost. (De Agostini/Getty Images)

In military campaigns extending from 337 to 363, the Persian and Roman armies repeatedly fought over the control of Mesopotamia and Armenia. Despite heavy casualties, the Persians managed to capture the Roman outposts of Sanjara (Sinjar) in present-day northern Iraq and Amida (present-day Diyarbakir) in southeastern Turkey. The Romans struck back in 363 CE. The Roman emperor Julian, also known as Julian the Apostate, marched at the head of a large and well-equipped army toward Mesopotamia. Accompanying Julian and his army was the pretender Persian prince Hormozd, who was to replace Shapur II after the anticipated Roman victory. Julian split his

forces in two. The main Roman army moved into southern Mesopotamia and attacked the Persian capital, Ctesiphon, near modern-day Baghdad in present-day Iraq. Another Roman army moved directly east to join forces with the Armenian king who had lent his support to the Roman cause. Though he defeated a small Persian force outside the gates of Ctesiphon, Julian could not penetrate the strong defenses of the city. As Shapur and the Persian army approached Ctesiphon, Julian and his officers burned the boats that had transported them to southern Mesopotamia and marched eastward to confront the Sasanian king in an open battle. Shapur avoided an open confrontation and instead resorted to surprise attacks waged by the Persian cavalry (the *savārān*). The principal objective of these attacks was to demoralize the enemy and force it to withdraw its forces. In the Battle of Samara between a unit of the Persian cavalry and Roman forces, Julian received the mortal wound that killed him three days later. The Romans had no other choice but to sue for peace and agree to significant territorial concessions. Julian's successor, Jovian (r. 363–364 CE), signed a peace treaty that returned to Shapur the five provinces that Narseh had lost. The Romans also ceded the strategic outposts of Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey and Sanjara in northern Iraq. They also promised to cease their interference in the internal affairs of Armenia. Shapur II imposed his rule over Armenia. One of the direct consequences of these Persian victories was the large number of Roman prisoners of war who were settled in the interior of the Sasanian state as skilled craftsmen, builders, and engineers. Shapur also settled a large number of Persians in the newly conquered cities, particularly in Nisibis, which served as an outpost against future Roman incursions.

SHAPUR II ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Much of the reign of Shapur II (309–379 CE) was spent in wars against the Romans. His principal objective was to nullify the Peace of Nisibis, which his grandfather, the Sasanian monarch Narseh, had signed with the Romans in 299, changing the border between the Roman and Persian Empires from the Euphrates River to the Tigris River and allowing the Romans to restore their power in Armenia. Shapur II was determined to regain the five provinces that Narseh had lost to the Romans. In military campaigns extending from 337 to 363, the Persian and Roman armies repeatedly clashed over the control of Mesopotamia and Armenia. Once the military campaigns came to an end, the Romans returned to Shapur the five provinces that the Sasanian monarch Narseh had lost.

In 303 CE, the Armenian king Tiridates, who had allied himself

with the Romans, converted to Christianity. Then in 312, Emperor Constantine I converted to Christianity and began to promote his new faith as the state religion of the Roman Empire. In 330, Constantine transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium (later Constantinople) on the shores of the Bosporus. One of the reasons for moving the capital from Rome to Byzantium was the proximity of the new capital to the borders of the Sasanian state. Constantine proclaimed himself as the king of all Christians, including Christians living in the Sasanian territory. These developments convinced Shapur to view the Christians of the Sasanian Empire as the allies of his most formidable foe. It also swayed Shapur to augment his support for Zoroastrianism as the national religion of the Persian state. Despite the growing tension between the Sasanian state and its Christian community, the Persian Empire remained a religiously heterogeneous state containing significant non-Zoroastrian communities, including Jews, Christians, and Buddhists.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Taq-e Bostan; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir II; Hormozd III; Narseh; Shapur III; Primary Documents: Document 33

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Shapur III

Shapur III was a king of kings of the Persian Sasanian dynasty who

ruled from 383 to 388 CE. Shapur III was the son of Shapur II, the longest-reigning monarch of the Sasanian dynasty, who ruled from 309 to 379 CE. During the reign of Shapur III, the conflict over Armenia erupted once again between the Sasanian and Roman Empires. Shapur II had reestablished Sasanian rule over Armenia, Georgia, and Albania. The Arsacid dynasts of Armenia ruled as vassals of the Sasanian king. A small portion of Armenia, however, remained under Roman rule. Emperor Theodosius intended to expand the territory of Roman-controlled Armenia by dispatching an army to the eastern frontiers of his empire in 383/384 (Frye: 141). Military confrontation between the two powers was avoided, however, when the Persian monarch and the Roman emperor agreed to exchange embassies and settle their differences through negotiations. The conflict was resolved when the two empires agreed to redraw the boundaries of the Persian- and Roman-held Armenia. Aside from the conflict in Armenia, Shapur III may have also been involved in a campaign against the Kushans in Balkh in present-day northern Afghanistan (Frye: 142).

Taq-e Bostan, an important Persian Sasanian historical site located near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran, includes several rock reliefs dating from the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). The site is home to two arched grottoes, two royal investiture scenes, and two highly detailed reliefs of a royal hunt. The reliefs provide the visitor with a rare window into the daily life of Iran's pre-Islamic kings and the magnificent world of Sasanian art. Next to the bas-relief of the investiture of Ardashir II are two grottoes. On the back wall of the first and smaller grotto stand the sculptures of Shapur II and Shapur III. The hands of both monarchs rest on the pommel of a large sword. This is clearly not an investiture scene, because no diadem of kingship is exchanged between the two monarchs. A Middle Persian inscription further identifies the two kings facing each other as Shapur II and Shapur III. Muslim historians such as Tabari praised Shapur III as a kind and justice-loving monarch who ordered his officials to treat the ordinary people with compassion and fairness (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.606–607). The Sasanian king of kings died or was murdered when his tent collapsed on him in 388 CE (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.607).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Taq-e Bostan; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir II; Shapur II

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Yazdegerd I

Yazdegerd I was a Sasanian king of kings who ruled from 399 to 421 CE. He ascended the throne after the ruling monarch, Bahram IV (r. 388–399 CE), was assassinated by members of the Persian nobility. Several sources refer to Yazdegerd as the son of Bahram IV, while others call him the brother of Bahram (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.607). The Roman sources refer to Yazdegerd I as an intelligent, generous, compassionate, and peaceful ruler. In sharp contrast, the Persian and Arab authors call him a "sinner" (*bazehkar* or *bezehgar*). These sources denounced Yazdegerd as a ruler who abused his power by intimidating and silencing the nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. The Persian epic poet Ferdowsi condemned him as a paranoid, cruel, and hedonistic monarch who oppressed the poor, ridiculed scholarship and learning, and refused to reward those who had served him faithfully. The historian Tabari described Yazdegerd as a brutal and vicious tyrant who always displayed a preference for wickedness and malevolence. As a temperamental and unstable ruler, he refused to ignore and forgive the most insignificant errors (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.608).

The harsh denunciation that Yazdegerd I received in various accounts can be attributed to his peaceful stance toward the Romans and his tolerant attitude toward non-Zoroastrian religious communities living in the Sasanian domains, particularly the Jews and the Christians. His unpopularity among the members of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy was caused by his decision to execute several Zoroastrian priests who had criticized his benevolent and lenient attitude toward religious minorities. His policies alienated him from a large segment of the empire's ruling class, particularly the Zoroastrian religious leadership and the powerful members of the

Persian nobility. But these same policies were praised by the Byzantine historian Agathias, who described the Sasanian monarch as a "friendly and peaceable" ruler for refusing to wage a war on the Romans (Agathias: IV.26.8).

Throughout his reign, Yazdegerd maintained a cordial relationship with the Roman emperors Arcadius (r. 395–408 CE) and Theodosius II (r. 408–450 CE). At the time the Roman Empire was under attack by the Goths, who had invaded and ravaged southeastern Europe. The Romans were also preoccupied with rebellions in their eastern provinces. These circumstances would have provided a golden opportunity for the Sasanian state to attack the Roman-held cities and provinces in northern Mesopotamia. Yazdegerd, however, refused to take advantage of the enemy's weakness and invade Mesopotamia. His consistently peaceful attitude convinced the Roman emperor Arcadius to designate Yazdegerd I as the guardian and protector of his infant son, Theodosius (future Theodosius II), "enjoining upon" the Persian monarch "earnestly in his will to preserve the empire for Theodosius" (Procopius: I.ii.7–8). Yazdegerd agreed to the proposed arrangement and "adopted a policy of profound peace with the Romans," refusing to attack Roman territory after the death of Arcadius (Procopius: I.ii.10). His policy of peace and reconciliation toward the Romans earned him the praise of Byzantine sources, which called him a man of noble character, "amazing and remarkable" (Procopius: I.ii.8–9).

For much of his reign Yazdegerd also displayed a high level of tolerance toward the Christian and Jewish communities in the Sasanian Empire. He allowed his Christian subjects to practice their religion in peace and freedom. Previously demolished churches and monasteries were rebuilt, and Christian missionaries were allowed to operate freely in Sasanian domains. Toward the end of his reign, however, the Sasanian monarch reversed his policy toward Christians and adopted repressive measures against their missionary activities. He denounced the Christians for fanaticism, as reflected in their attacks on Zoroastrian beliefs and temples.

As he had initially done with his Christian subjects, Yazdegerd I also adopted a highly tolerant attitude toward the Jewish communities in the Sasanian domains. His kind and compassionate policy toward his Jewish subjects was praised by Jewish leaders, who compared him to the Persian Achaemenid king Cyrus the Great (r. 558–530 BCE), the liberator of the Jews from captivity in Babylon.

Aside from his tolerant attitude toward religious minorities, Yazdegerd also paid special attention to the poor and the needy in his domains. In addition, he tried hard to curtail the power and interference of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood in the empire's decision-making process. The reign of Yazdegerd and his

troubled relationship with the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious leadership demonstrate the ongoing tension between independent-minded Sasanian monarchs and those segments of Iran's ruling class who viewed themselves as the king makers. The Sasanian monarch, however, refused to tolerate any opposition from the court magnates and the Zoroastrian high priest. Yazdegerd was fully aware that his royal predecessors, the Sasanian monarchs Bahram IV (r. 388–399 CE) and Shapur III (r. 383–388 CE), both had been assassinated through a conspiracy hatched by members of the Persian nobility. He consequently showed little mercy and dealt with their criticism through ruthless suppression, executing their powerful and influential leaders. Not surprisingly therefore, Muslim historiography, which relied on Sasanian sources, denounced Yazdegerd I as a ruler with numerous defects, including a violent temper.

After Yazdegerd I died in 421 CE, powerful members of the nobility refused to allow any of his sons to succeed their father. The oldest son of Yazdegerd, Shapur, who served as the governor of Armenia, was murdered after he marched to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon to claim his father's throne. However, another son, Bahram, refused to accept defeat. He marched against Ctesiphon at the head of an army he had raised with assistance from his friend and mentor, Mundhir I, the Arab Lakhmid ruler of Hira in present-day southern Iraq. Bahram subsequently established himself as the new ruler of the Sasanian Empire.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram IV; Bahram V; Shapur III; Yazdegerd II

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Yazdegerd II

Yazdegerd II was a Sasanian king of kings who ruled from 439 to 457 CE. He ascended the throne after the death of his father Bahram V, also known as Bahram-e Gor (Gur), who ruled from 421 to 439 CE. The fifth century CE was a period of rapid decline for the Sasanian state. Before Yazdegerd II's grandfather, Yazdegerd I, ascended the throne, three consecutive Sasanian monarchs had been murdered by the Persian nobility. The reign of Yazdegerd I was characterized by a tense relationship between the king, who favored a peaceful rapport with the Romans and a tolerant attitude toward non-Zoroastrian religious minorities, and the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood who denounced their king as a tyrannical "sinner." The tension between the crown and the nobility and the priesthood reached such a point that Yazdegerd I ordered the execution of several priests who had complained about his tolerant policies toward Jewish and Christian communities of the Sasanian Empire.

Yazdegerd II's father, Bahram V, fought the nobility and the priesthood to seize the Sasanian throne, but once on the throne, he adopted a conciliatory attitude toward them. Fully aware of the strain between his royal predecessors on the one hand and the nobility and priesthood on the other, Yazdegerd II attempted to reduce these tensions by adopting a policy of appeasement and reconciliation. It is not surprising therefore that he was praised by Persian sources, which had criticized his grandfather as hot tempered and cruel and his father as a pleasure-seeking ruler obsessed with hunting and feasting. Yazdegerd appears in these writings as a kind and compassionate king. In reality, however, he returned to the policy of persecuting the members of Jewish and Christian communities, the very approach rejected and denounced by his grandfather.

Because of the nomadic invasions from Central Asia and the absence of the king from his capital, the daily administrative affairs and responsibilities of the central government were handled by Mehr Narseh, the chief minister (*wuzurg farmadār*) who had emerged as the second most powerful man in the empire during the reigns of Yazdegerd I and Bahram V (Tabari: *Tarikh-e Tabari,* 2.627). Mehr

Narseh was dispatched by his royal master to Armenia to reestablish Zoroastrianism as the religion of the country's ruling classes. This campaign resulted in a major revolt by a group of Armenian nobles. The rebels killed Sasanian dignitaries and Zoroastrian priests, thus providing a justification for Yazdegerd to organize a military campaign to reimpose his authority over Armenia. A Sasanian army marched to Armenia and crushed the rebellion in 451 CE. The Armenian nobles and Christian priests who had led the revolt were killed, and those who survived were sent into exile in 454.

The Armenians were not the only group, however, to suffer persecution. Yazdegerd also unleashed the power of the Sasanian state against the Jewish communities of his empire. He prohibited his Jewish subjects from celebrating the Sabbath in public. He also went one step further and closed down Jewish schools. Several Jewish leaders were also executed. These harsh policies resulted in a Jewish rebellion. When the Jews in the city of Isfahan killed two Zoroastrian priests, the Sasanian authorities used the incident as a justification to clamp down and apply even harsher measures against the Jewish communities of the empire.

Much of Yazdegerd's reign was spent in military campaigns against the Roman Empire and the invading Hephthalite hordes from Central Asia. Yazdegerd II began his reign by waging a military campaign against the Romans in 440 CE. The war between the two powers proved to be short and inconclusive. Forced to shift his focus to North Africa, which had been attacked and occupied by the invading Vandals, the Roman emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–450 CE) sued for peace and agreed to make payments to the Sasanian king, who was also given free rein in Armenia. Yazdegerd used this opportunity to complete his pacification of Armenia and reestablish Sasanian power in the southern Caucasus.

With his western frontiers secured, Yazdegerd II spent the rest of his reign fighting the Hephthalites, who were threatening the eastern provinces of his empire. Despite Yazdegerd's best efforts to contain this threat, the eastern frontiers of the Sasanian state were repeatedly breached by the invading nomads after his death. After the death of Yazdegerd II, the Hephthalites also intervened in the Sasanian succession process by providing support for a pretender to the throne, Peroz. A son of Yazdegerd II, Peroz had refused to acknowledge the authority of his brother Hormozd III, who had proclaimed himself the king of kings after the death of their father. While Hormozd III began to rule from Ray south of present-day Tehran, Peroz seized Khorasan and Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan) and began to raise an army to battle his brother. Meanwhile, the queen mother, Denak or Dinak, ran the daily affairs of the empire from Ctesiphon,

the capital of the Sasanian Empire in today's southern Iraq. In return for promises of territorial concessions, the Hephthalites provided Peroz with reinforcements. Peroz marched at the head of a large army and defeated his brother Hormozd, who was killed on the battlefield.

Both Persian and Arabic historical sources refer to Yazdegerd II as a mild and benevolent king who stood for justice and compassion toward his subjects. He was also praised for abandoning his father's overindulgence in hunting and feasting and for displaying a genuine devotion to the Zoroastrian faith, which was reflected in his systematic persecution of his empire's Jewish and Christian communities. These accounts reflect the opinion and sentiments of the Persian nobility and particularly the Zoroastrian clergy, which used the Sasanian state as a means of imposing their control over the religious and cultural life of the empire.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram V; Peroz; Yazdegerd I

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Yazdegerd III

The last monarch of the Persian Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE) who ascended the throne at the age of eight in 633 CE. After Sasanian forces were defeated by Muslim Arabs, Yazdegerd III fled east to mobilize his forces in northeastern Iran and seek assistance and support from the Tang dynasty of China. However, he was killed near Marv (Merv) in northeastern Iran (present-day southern Turkmenistan) in 651.

On the evening of February 23, 628 CE, a group of plotters staged a coup against the reigning Persian Sasanian monarch, Khosrow II Parvez. The son of Khosrow, Kavad Shiruya (Shiroy), who had played a leading role in the plot, was released from detention, and a herald proclaimed him the king of kings. The gates of the jails were also opened, and all prisoners were allowed to escape. Khosrow II fled the palace but was eventually captured. Two days later, his son Shiruya ascended the throne as Kavad II. The new monarch, who had initially promised to restore peace and reverse the harsh policies of his father, initiated a bloodbath by killing all his brothers. He then ordered the execution of his father. The Sasanian Empire never recovered from this mad rampage. Shiruya himself did not last very long on the throne. A few months after coming to power he succumbed to a plague, which had already devastated the western provinces of the Sasanian Empire. Shiruya's son and successor, Ardashir III (r. 628–630 CE), was killed by the Sasanian general Shahrbaraz, who was in turn murdered 40 days later by members of the Persian nobility, who installed Khosrow III on the throne. After the short reign of Khosrow III in 630 and in the absence of an eligible male offspring, a daughter of Khosrow II, Boran (Puran), ascended the Sasanian throne. When Boran died after a short reign, she was succeeded by her sister Azarmidokht, another daughter of Khosrow, who could only manage to rule for a few months.

Eventually after a succession of two short-lived and powerless monarchs, Hormozd V and Khosrow IV, the Persian nobility placed Yazdegerd, a prince of the Sasanian dynasty, on the throne. Yazdegerd was a son of the Sasanian prince Shahryar, who had been murdered by Shiruya in 628, and a grandson of Khosrow II. Yazdegerd was only eight years old when he ascended the throne in 633. He was crowned not in the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon but in the fire temple of Ardashir I at Istakhr in the southern Iranian province of Fars.

The young monarch lacked any power to restore calm and order to his vast empire. He was merely a powerless spectator who could only watch the incessant infighting between army commanders, courtiers, and powerful members of the nobility as they battled among themselves and eliminated one another. Throughout the empire, the powerful provincial magnates were raising the flag of rebellion and

governing as independent rulers. The Sasanian Empire was disintegrating rapidly. As chaos and decline accelerated, Sasanian territory was invaded on all sides by powerful neighbors. The eastern borders of the empire were breached by the Turks, while the Khazars invaded its northern provinces by using the Caucasus region to raid Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Asia Minor. In the end, however, it was a powerful force bursting out of the Arabian Peninsula that brought about the collapse of the Sasanian state. After the death of Abu Bakr, the first caliph and successor to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, the reins of power were passed to Umar (r. 634–644 CE), who organized military campaigns against the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires. In 635/636, an Arab army commanded by the Arab general Sa'd ibn Waqqas defeated a Sasanian army at Qadisiyyah, southwest of Hira near present-day Kufa in southern Iraq. The Persian commander Rostam Farrokhzad fell on the battlefield. This victory paved the way for the capture of Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital, which was sacked and looted by the invading Muslim Arabs. The shocking defeat forced Yazdegerd III to flee to Media in western Iran, taking with him the royal treasury and a group of bodyguards and servants. The desperate Persian monarch appealed to his generals and the powerful landowning families, who constituted the military backbone of the Persian Empire, for support. A large army was raised, but once again it failed to slow down the Arab armies, which had seized the offensive.

In 642, Arab Muslim armies defeated the Persian Sasanian forces for a second time at Nahavand in present-day western Iran. The ill-fated Persian monarch had no other alternative but to flee once again. Yazdegerd first traveled from Media to Ray, south of present-day Tehran, and then to Isfahan. From Isfahan he set out for Istakhr in southern Iran, but when Fars was invaded by an Arab army, he fled to Kerman in southeastern Iran. From Kerman he went to Sistan in eastern Iran, but he could not stay there either. In a last desperate attempt to save his life and rescue the Sasanian state, Yazdegerd III fled to northeastern Iran. He was most probably trying to reach China through Central Asia and seek support from the Chinese emperor. Yazdegerd had already sent an embassy led by his son, Peroz, to China to plead for assistance from the Tang dynasty. In 651 CE near the city of Marv in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan, Yazdegerd III was murdered by a miller with whom he had sought sanctuary. The miller apparently found the jewels, which the royal fugitive carried with him, too irresistible. The death of the last Sasanian king and the collapse of the Persian state allowed the Arab armies to complete their conquest of Iran with relative ease. Soon the Arab armies would seize Khorasan in northeastern Iran and use it as a territorial base to invade

Central Asia.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Azarmidokht; Boran (Puran); Kavad II Shiruya; Khosrow II Parvez

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Kings and Queens of the Seleucid Dynasty

OVERVIEW ESSAY

This chapter is devoted to entries that focus exclusively on the lives and careers of the rulers of the Seleucid dynasty. The Seleucid state was founded by Seleucus I Nicator (r. 305–281 BCE), a former commander in the army of Alexander the Macedon (Alexander the Great). At the zenith of its power, the Seleucid state ruled a vast empire extending from present-day Afghanistan in the east to Syria, Palestine, and present-day Lebanon in the west.

In 324 BCE, a year before his death, Alexander had organized a mass wedding ceremony at Susa in present-day southwestern Iran, where he ordered his generals to marry Iranian wives. He hoped that these marriages would create unity between the Macedonians and Iranians. Seleucus was ordered to marry Apame (Apama), a daughter of the Iranian Sogdian dignitary, Spitaman. The Seleucid dynasty was born from this Macedonian–Iranian union. After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE in Babylon, his army commanders turned against one another as each tried to carve out a kingdom of his own. After many years of fighting for his own kingdom, Seleucus seized Babylon in 312 BCE. His conquest marked the beginning of the Seleucid era. In 303 BCE, Seleucus assumed the title of king and established his capital at Seleucia-on-Tigris in present-day southern Iraq. He also used his newly acquired kingdom as a territorial base to extend his rule over the territory of much of present-day Iran and Afghanistan.

After the end of his campaign in the east, Seleucus returned west and joined a coalition of several kings, namely Ptolemy of Egypt, Lysimachus of Thrace, and Casandra of Macedonia, that had been formed to contain and defeat the powerful and ambitious Antigonus, the ruler of Asia Minor. In 301 BCE, Seleucus and Lysimachus marched against Antigonus and defeated him at Ipsus in Phrygia in west-central Asia Minor in the Battle of the Kings. Antigonus was

killed, and his son Demetrius fled. The victors then divided Antigonus's kingdom between them. Seleucus received Syria, although Ptolemy of Egypt had already occupied the southern part of the country, known as Coele Syria. This move caused a conflict between the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria that continued for over a century. In 300 BCE, Seleucus transferred the Seleucid capital from Seleucia-on-Tigris to a new capital, Antioch, in northern Syria (present-day southern Turkey), which he built on the shores of the Orontes River. This proved to be a fatal decision. The long distance between the new capital and the faraway eastern provinces of the empire in Iran and Central Asia allowed the governors of these regions to revolt and establish their own independent kingdoms. It also provided an opportunity for various nomadic groups in Central Asia to invade the eastern provinces of the Seleucid Empire and establish their own dynasties. Arsaces (Arshak), founder of the Arsacid or Parthian dynasty, was one of the nomadic chiefs who created his own kingdom after invading northeastern Iran from Central Asia.

To maintain tighter Seleucid control over these regions, Seleucus appointed his son, Antiochus, as the ruler of the empire's eastern provinces and bestowed upon him the title of co-regent. Meanwhile in the west, Seleucus became increasingly entangled in the internal conflicts that were tearing asunder the ruling house of Lysimachus, the ruler of Thrace and Seleucus's former ally. In the winter of 281 BCE, Seleucus defeated and killed Lysimachus at Corupedium in western Asia Minor. As he crossed into Europe to consolidate his rule over Macedonia, Seleucus was murdered by the son of Ptolemy of Egypt, Ptolemy Ceraunus, who had been passed over by his father as successor to the Egyptian throne. Seleucus I was succeeded by his son and co-regent Antiochus I Soter.

The incessant conflict with the Ptolemaic kingdom based in Egypt diverted the attention of the Seleucid kings from their eastern provinces and forced them to concentrate their military power and financial resources in the west. The interdynastic rivalries among various Seleucid contenders to the throne further undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the Seleucid monarchy. Successors to Seleucus I tried several times to reassert their authority in the east. The most serious effort took place during the reign of Antiochus III (r. 223–187 BCE), who in 209 BCE embarked on an ambitious campaign to reestablish Seleucid rule over present-day Iran and northern Afghanistan. This campaign was intended to neutralize the threat posed by the newly emerging Arsacid state, which had established itself in Parthia. Antiochus managed to force the Arsacids to make a tactical retreat and acknowledge Seleucid suzerainty, but he failed to

destroy them. Antiochus also tried to neutralize the threat posed by Euthydemus, ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. As with the Arsacids, Antiochus was unable to dislodge Euthydemus and impose his own direct rule. From Bactria, Antiochus crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and entered the Kabul Valley. After marching through present-day southern Afghanistan and reaching the modern-day southeastern Iranian provinces of Sistan-Baluchistan and Kerman, Antiochus reached Parsa (Persis), the birthplace of the Achaemenid dynasty in southern Iran. Having reestablished a network of vassal kingdoms in Iran, Antiochus assumed the Persian Achaemenid title "Great King." The Greeks also honored him with the title "the Great." After returning to Syria, Antiochus embarked on a series of military campaigns that would test his capabilities in the west, particularly against Egypt. As a result, he would emerge as the master of southern Syria and Palestine.

Confident of his power, Antiochus now decided to incorporate Thrace and Greece into his empire. Despite repeated diplomatic efforts from Rome, which warned Antiochus against crossing into Europe, the Seleucid monarch continued with his westward push into mainland Greece. In 190 BCE, the Romans finally crossed into Asia. Antiochus, whose fleet had already been destroyed by the combined naval forces of Rome, Rhodes, and Pergamum, sued for peace, but the Romans now demanded that he should withdraw his forces from all his possessions north and west of the Taurus Mountains in present-day southern Turkey. Antiochus rejected the Roman demand and opted for military confrontation. At the subsequent Battle of Magnesia in late 190 BCE, Antiochus suffered a humiliating defeat. In the Treaty of Apamea he renounced all claim to territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send to Rome a group of hostages, including his son, the future Antiochus IV; to pay a heavy war indemnity; and to surrender his fleet and elephants.

With this defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. The defeat at Magnesia undermined the credibility of the Seleucids in the east. By the time the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE) seized the throne in Syria, the power of the Seleucid monarchy was waning rapidly in Iran, though the Seleucid state maintained its rule over Mesopotamia and parts of western and southern Iran. Early in the reign of Antiochus IV, conflict again erupted between the Seleucids and the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, specifically over the control of southern Syria, Palestine, and Phoenicia. In 169 and again in 168 BCE, Antiochus IV invaded and occupied Egypt, but under an ultimatum from Rome he was forced to withdraw, although he managed to retain

his control over southern Syria. He next turned his attentions to a planned military campaign against the Arsacids (Parthians) of northeastern Iran, who were pushing their territorial possessions westward, threatening Seleucid-held territories in north-central and western Iran. Although Antiochus IV began by marching successfully against Armenia and imposing his suzerainty over the Armenian king, he was forced to withdraw his army from Persis in southern Iran when the population there revolted against him. He returned west to the important urban center of Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan in western Iran), where he injured himself in a fall from his chariot. Antiochus IV died from an illness in central Iran in 164 BCE, and his planned invasion of Parthia never materialized.

By 145 BCE, when Demetrius II Nicator (r. 145–141 BCE) ascended the Seleucid throne, the Parthia-based Arsacids, under the leadership of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), were, through a series of military victories, expanding their domains from northeastern Iran to the lands east, west, and southwest of their kingdom. These Arsacid victories forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by invading Iran. The campaign, however, proved to be disastrous for him, and he was defeated and captured by the Arsacids. During his absence from Syria, Demetrius's wife and queen, Cleopatra Thea, ascended the throne as regent. Not long afterward, a usurper named Tryphon emerged as a pretender to the Seleucid throne. To save the Seleucid state, the younger brother of Demetrius II, Antiochus, returned to Syria in 139 BCE. He ascended the throne as Antiochus VII and married his brother's wife, Cleopatra Thea. In 138 BCE Antiochus defeated the would-be usurper Tryphon before moving against Jerusalem, which he captured in 135/134 BCE.

With Palestine under his rule, Antiochus VII Sidetes shifted his focus to the east with the goal of restoring Seleucid rule in Iran. In 130 BCE, he attacked and defeated Parthian armies in three military campaigns. With winter approaching, Antiochus scattered his army and stationed its units in various towns and cities of western Iran. The behavior of these units, however, caused the populace in several urban centers to revolt against Seleucid rule. The Parthian ruler Phraates II used this golden opportunity to field an army. Wishing to feel out his enemy first, Phraates sent envoys to negotiate a possible peace agreement. Antiochus VII responded that he would be willing to cease hostilities and conclude a peace treaty only if certain conditions were met. He demanded that Phraates release his brother, Demetrius, from captivity; withdraw forces from the provinces the Parthians had seized; and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord. Phraates II rejected all but one demand. He released Demetrius from captivity and allowed him to return to Syria. Phraates probably hoped that the

return of Demetrius would result in a civil war between the two brothers. Phraates also placed a large army in the field. Against the advice of his officials, who pleaded with him to avoid a hasty foray, Antiochus marched against the much larger Parthian force. When the two armies joined in battle, Phraates II defeated Antiochus, who was killed on the battlefield. The victory of Phraates II over Antiochus VII put an end to Seleucid rule in Iran. The remaining territory of the Seleucid state, which was confined to Syria and the southern coastal region of Asia Minor in present-day Turkey, was conquered by the Romans. With the disappearance of the Seleucid state, the Roman Republic and the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire became neighbors.

Alexander Balas

The king of Syria and parts of the Seleucid Empire. Alexander Balas is best known as the usurper who seized the Seleucid throne in 150 BCE after overthrowing and killing Demetrius I Soter. Alexander Balas ruled the Seleucid state for five years until he was overthrown by Demetrius, the oldest son of Demetrius I, in 145 BCE.

Alexander Balas hailed from Smyrna on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor. His rise to power coincided with the outbreak of conflict between the Seleucid monarch Demetrius I and the three monarchs Ptolemy Philometor of Egypt, Ariarathes V of Cappadocia, and Attalus II of Pergamon (Justin: XXXV.1). The three kings who had been attacked by Demetrius set up Balas, a young man of humble extraction, “to lay claim to the kingdom of Syria” (Justin: XXXV.1). To legitimate the unknown upstart, they gave Balas “the name of Alexander, pretending that he was the son of Antiochus IV” (Justin: XXXV.1). With support from these three monarchs and using the unpopularity of Demetrius, which was nearly universal, Alexander Balas raised an army and marched against Demetrius I Soter, who was defeated and killed. Alexander Balas cemented his alliance with Ptolemy Philometor of Egypt by marrying his daughter. The alliance between Alexander and Ptolemy Philometor, however, broke down quickly. Ptolemy, who dreamt of seizing Coele Syria, the region between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges, negotiated a secret agreement with Demetrius, the son of Demetrius I Soter. The two agreed that Alexander Balas had to be removed. Once they had overthrown the hated usurper, Ptolemy would receive Coele Syria, and Demetrius would receive “his ancestral lands” (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXII.27.9c–9d). In 145 BCE, Demetrius defeated Alexander Balas, who “fled with five hundred men to Abae in Arabia, to take refuge with Diocles, the local sheikh, in whose care he had earlier placed his

infant son Antiochus" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXII.27.9d–10.1). Heliades and Cassius, two officers who were with Alexander, "entered into secret negotiations" with Demetrius II and "voluntarily offered to assassinate Alexander" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXII.27.10.1–3). When Demetrius II agreed to the assassination plan, the two officers killed Alexander. Meanwhile, the conflict between Demetrius II, the legitimate heir to the Seleucid throne, and Alexander Balas provided the Arsacid monarch Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE) with the opportunity to seize Media sometime in 148 or 147 BCE. From Media, the Parthian forces moved southwest and captured Babylonia in 141 BCE. These conquests forced Demetrius II to raise an army and march against Mithridates I, whose armies defeated and captured the ill-fated Seleucid monarch.

Coin of the pretender, Alexander Balas, who seized the Seleucid throne by murdering the Seleucid monarch Demetrius I Soter in 150 BCE. He tried to consolidate his rule over the remains of the disintegrating Seleucid Empire but was

defeated and killed by Demetrius II Nicator, the son of Demetrius I Soter, in 145 BCE. (www.BibleLandPictures.com/Alamy Stock Photo)

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; Phraates I; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Demetrius I Soter; Demetrius II Nicator; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Seleucids

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Antiochus I Soter

The second king of the Seleucid dynasty who ruled Iran, Mesopotamia, and parts of Asia Minor from 281 to 261 BCE. Antiochus I succeeded his father, Seleucus I, the founder of the Seleucid dynasty, in 281 BCE. Antiochus's mother was Apame (Apama), a daughter of the Sogdian dignitary Spitaman (Spitamanes). In 294, Antiochus's father appointed him as ruler of the empire's eastern provinces and bestowed upon him the title of co-regent. In 280 BCE, shortly after he had ascended the throne, nomadic groups raided the southern regions of Central Asia, but Antiochus managed to expel them. In 281 BCE, after his father was assassinated, Antiochus ascended the Seleucid throne. A short time later, revolts broke out in Syria and parts of Asia Minor. Cappadocia proclaimed its independence and defeated a Seleucid army under the command of the general Amyntas. The Seleucid state was also forced into its first war against the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt. Another challenge was posed by Antigonus II Gonatas, the king of Macedonia and Greece. In 279, when Gauls invaded Greece, Antigonus and Antiochus signed a noninterference pact promising that they would cease attacks against each other's possessions. In 278, the Gauls invaded Asia Minor. Antiochus could not respond immediately to the threat from the Gauls because he had not yet managed to

restore peace in Syria. Once peace and order had been restored in Syria, however, Antiochus attacked the Gauls and defeated them in 275 BCE. The Ionian city-states, which he had protected against the Gauls, bestowed upon him the title *soter* (savior).

Silver tetradrachm of the second Seleucid monarch, Antiochus I Soter. Antiochus I was the son of Seleucus I, founder of the Seleucid state, and his Iranian Sogdian queen, Apame/Apama. (Yale University Gallery of Art)

The conflict with Egypt flared up again in 276 when an Egyptian army attacked northern Syria but was defeated by Antiochus. Ptolemy II of Egypt did not, however, back down. His forces invaded again and this time succeeded in occupying Phoenicia and the Asia Minor coast by 272/271 BCE. Antiochus's preoccupation with Syria and Asia Minor weakened Seleucid authority in faraway Iran. To reestablish Seleucid control in the east, Antiochus sent his oldest son, Seleucus, to Iran. Seleucus proved to be inept, however, and was eventually

executed in 266 BCE. Toward the end of his reign, Antiochus was forced into a war against Eumenes of Pergamum (present-day western Turkey), who had declared his independence. In 262 BCE, the armies of Pergamum inflicted a humiliating defeat on Antiochus. Antiochus died shortly after this defeat in 261 BCE and was succeeded by his second son, Antiochus II.

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus II Theos; Seleucus I Nicator; *Peoples:* Seleucids; Spitaman

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Antiochus II Theos

The third king of the Seleucid dynasty who ruled Iran, Mesopotamia, and parts of Asia Minor from 261 to 246 BCE. Antiochus II Theos was the second son of Antiochus I. Antiochus II was designated as his father's successor after his older brother, Seleucus, was executed. Antiochus II spent much of his reign in military campaigns against Ptolemy II of Egypt. He formed an alliance with Antigonus, the ruler of Macedonia, and waged a two-pronged war against Egypt between 260/259 and 255 BCE. The principal objective of this military campaign was to recover the territories his father had lost in his wars against the Ptolemaic dynasty. With support from the Macedonian king who defeated the Egyptian fleet at sea, Antiochus occupied much of Asia Minor and the Phoenician coast, corresponding with present-day Lebanon. In 253 BCE, Ptolemy II of Egypt agreed to sign a peace treaty recognizing the territorial gains of Antiochus II. The preoccupation of Antiochus with the western frontiers of his empire allowed the governors of his eastern provinces to break away from the Seleucid central government. Scythian nomadic groups from Central Asia also penetrated the northeastern frontiers of the Seleucid Empire. Eventually one of these groups, the Parni or Aparni, would establish

the Arsacid (Parthian) state in northeastern Iran.

In 253/252 BCE Antiochus II separated from his wife, Laodice, and married Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II and the sister of Ptolemy III of Egypt. In 246 BCE, however, Antiochus left his second queen and decided to return to Laodice. Shortly afterward in the summer of 246 BCE, Antiochus died. He was most probably poisoned by Laodice. With the death of Antiochus the two queens entered into a civil war, with Berenice and her five-year-old son, Antiochus, receiving support from Ptolemy III, the ruler of Egypt. It was not long, however, until the agents of Laodice killed Antiochus. Antiochus's mother, Berenice, was also murdered a short time later.

Meanwhile, the older son of Antiochus II, Seleucus II, ascended the throne. His younger brother, Antiochus Hireax, was appointed the governor of Asia Minor. The dynastic conflict in faraway Syria convinced some of the governors of the eastern provinces to revolt and proclaim their independence. Diodotus, the governor of Bactria, broke away from the Seleucids and established his own independent Greco-Bactrian kingdom centered in present-day northern Afghanistan. Another governor, Andragoras of Parthia in present-day northeastern Iran, also separated his province from the Seleucid royal house. As the Seleucid Empire in the east began to disintegrate, Scythian groups from Central Asia penetrated northeastern Iran. One of these, the Parni or Aparni under the leadership of Arshak (Arsaces), attacked and seized Parthia. Arsaces defeated Andragoras and established his own kingdom in Parthia. The year 247 BCE marks the beginning of the Arsacid era. Arsaces's successors used Parthia as a base from which they expanded their territory and created the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Seleucus I Nicator; Seleucus II Callinicus; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Seleucids

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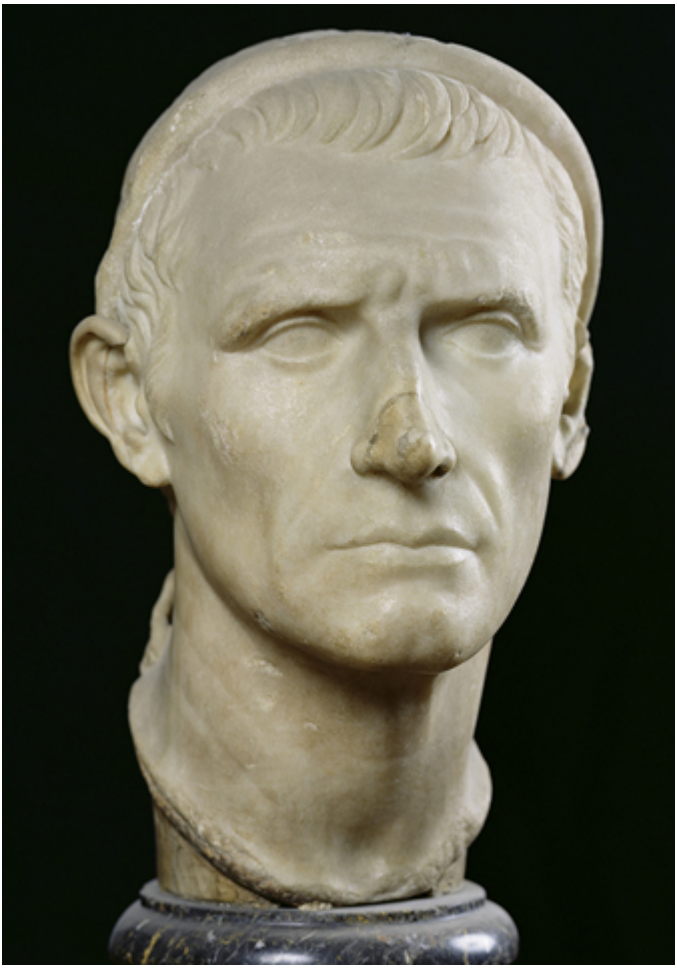
Antiochus III

Antiochus III was the sixth king of the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled Mesopotamia and large territories in Iran and Asia Minor. He ruled from 223 to 187 BCE. Antiochus III is generally recognized as the last great Seleucid monarch. His reign signaled the beginning of a period of rapid decline, which culminated in the defeat of the Seleucids first at the hands of the Romans and later by the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty based in northeastern Iran.

Antiochus III was the son of the Seleucid king Seleucus II and the younger brother of the Seleucid monarch Seleucus III. Antiochus, who ascended the throne after Seleucus III was murdered in Phrygia in 223, began his reign by consolidating his power within his kingdom. The Seleucid monarch appointed "two of his generals, the brothers Molon and Alexander," as governors of Media and Persis (Debevoise: 13). As with his predecessors, Antiochus focused his first military campaign against Egypt. He was soon forced to abandon this campaign and turn his attention to Media in western Iran, where his governor, Molon, had proclaimed himself an independent king. Molon may have been "inspired" by the "successes" of the Arsacid dynasty based in Parthia in northeastern Iran and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in present-day northern Afghanistan (Debevoise: 13). In 220 BCE, Antiochus marched to Media and defeated Molon, who committed suicide. From Media, Antiochus moved to Atropatene, present-day Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran. Artabazanes, the ruler of Atropatene, was forced to accept the suzerainty of the Seleucid king. Shortly after his victories in Iran, Antiochus ordered the execution of his chief minister, Hermias. Antiochus then organized a campaign to conquer the eastern Mediterranean coast, including the seaport of Seleucia-in-Pieria (present-day Tyre in Lebanon) as well as the entire territory of Phoenicia and Palestine. His conquests culminated in a military confrontation with the ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopator, in 217 BCE. In a peace agreement signed following the battle, Antiochus returned all his newly gained territories with the sole exception of Seleucia-in-Pieria, which he managed to retain. He followed his wars with Egypt with a campaign to impose Seleucid authority over Asia Minor. In 213 BCE, Antiochus seized Sardis in present-day western Turkey and executed Achaeus, the governor of Asia Minor who had revolted against him.



Replica of the bust of the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III. Antiochus III managed to re-impose Seleucid rule in the east, but he was defeated and humiliated by the Romans at the Battle of Magnesia. The Treaty of Apamea forced the Seleucid king to renounce his conquests in southeastern Europe and in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) west of the Taurus. (The Gallery Collection/Corbis)

From 209 to 205 BCE, Antiochus III embarked on an eastern campaign to reestablish Seleucid rule over Iran. One of the principal goals of this campaign was to neutralize the threat posed by the newly emerging Arsacid (Parthian) state, which had established itself in northeastern Iran. In 212 BCE, before embarking on his eastern campaign, Antiochus arranged a marriage between his sister, Antiochis, and King Xerxes of Armenia, who acknowledged his status as a vassal of the Seleucid monarch. Antiochus led his army into Iran and captured Hecatompylos (City of a Hundred Gates), present-day Shahr-e Qumis near Damghan in northern Iran. The Arsacid monarch Arsaces II fought the Seleucid army, estimated at 100,000 men and 20,000 horses, “with great bravery,” but he eventually made a tactical

retreat and agreed to an alliance with Antiochus (Justin: XLI.5). Antiochus also "found it prudent to make peace and a treaty of alliance" with the Arsacids (Debevoise: 18). Thus, the Arsacid kingdom survived.

Aside from the Parthians, Antiochus also attempted to neutralize the threat posed by Euthydemus, the ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. As with the Parthians, this campaign also resulted in limited success. A Seleucid army failed to capture Bactria, and in return for accepting the nominal sovereignty of the Seleucid king, Euthydemus was allowed to retain his position and title. From Bactria, Antiochus crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and entered the Kabul Valley in present-day central Afghanistan. He then moved on to Arachosia (present-day Qandahar or Kandahar in southern Afghanistan) and, marching through the southeastern Iranian provinces of Drangiana (Sistan-Baluchistan) and Carmania (Kerman), reached Persis, present-day Fars province in southern Iran, the birthplace of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, in 205 BCE. Having reestablished a network of vassal kingdoms in Iran, Antiochus assumed the Persian Achaemenid title "Great King." His Greek subjects honored him with the title "Antiochus the Great."

After he returned to Syria, Antiochus used the booty he had collected on his eastern campaign to attack Egypt. The death of the king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV, offered Antiochus an opportunity to seize southern Syria as well as the southern coastal regions of Asia Minor and the island of Cyprus. After concluding an alliance with Philip V of Macedonia, who sought to impose his rule over the western regions of Asia Minor, Antiochus attacked and defeated the Ptolemaic army sent against him in 200 BCE. With this victory, the Seleucid monarch emerged as the master of southern Syria and Palestine. Meanwhile, the military operations of Antiochus's ally, Philip of Macedonia, forced the smaller and more vulnerable states of the eastern Aegean seacoast and western Asia Minor, particularly Rhodes and Pergamum, to appeal to Rome for protection. Their plea allowed Rome to intervene militarily. Roman forces marched against Philip of Macedonia and defeated him. Instead of rushing to the rescue of his Macedonian ally, however, Antiochus used the war between Rome and Philip V to attack and occupy the possessions of the king of Egypt, Ptolemy V, in southern Syria and Asia Minor. Confident of his power, Antiochus now decided to incorporate Thrace and Greece into his empire. This move posed a direct threat to the position and status of Rome. Despite repeated diplomatic efforts by Rome that warned Antiochus against crossing into Europe, the Seleucid monarch continued with his westward push into mainland Greece. In 190 BCE, the Romans finally crossed into Asia. Antiochus, whose fleet had already been destroyed

by the combined naval forces of Rome, Rhodes, and Pergamum, sued for peace, but the Romans now demanded that he withdraw his forces from all his possessions north and west of the Taurus Mountains in present-day southern Turkey. Antiochus rejected the Roman demand and opted for military confrontation. When the two armies joined battle at Magnesia near Mount Sipylus in western Asia Minor in late 190 BCE, Antiochus and his heterogeneous army of 70,000 suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of a much smaller Roman army of 30,000. In the Treaty of Apamea signed in 188 BCE, Antiochus renounced his claims to all territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send a group of hostages, including his own son, the future Antiochus IV, to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity to the Romans; and surrender his fleet and elephants (Appian: 11.8.38–40). With the defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. The humiliation at Magnesia undermined the credibility of the Seleucids and convinced the pretenders to power in the east, particularly the Arsacids based in northeastern Iran, and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in northern Afghanistan to resume their campaigns of territorial expansion. In 187 BCE, Antiochus was killed near Susa in southwestern Iran. He was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV Philopator.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Arsaces II; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Seleucus II Callinicus; Seleucus III Soter; Seleucus IV Philopator; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Seleucids

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Antiochus IV Epiphanes

The eighth king of the Seleucid monarchy, which ruled Mesopotamia and parts of Iran from its capital at Antioch from 175 to 164 BCE. Antiochus IV was "called Epiphanes (the Illustrious) by the Syrians" (Appian: 11.8.45). Antiochus IV was the third son of the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III and the brother of the Seleucid king Seleucus IV. When Antiochus III was defeated by the Romans in the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BCE, he was forced to renounce all his claims to any territorial possessions north and west of the Taurus mountain range of southern Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). He had also agreed to send his son, the future Antiochus IV, as a hostage to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity; and surrender his fleet and elephants. Antiochus IV's stay in Rome between 189 and 175 BCE allowed him to familiarize himself with the manners and policies of Rome. When his brother Seleucus IV sent his own son Demetrius to Rome as the new Seleucid hostage, Antiochus returned home. In 175 BCE, after Seleucus IV was assassinated in a conspiracy by one of his courtiers, Helliodorus, Antiochus seized the throne. Early in his reign, the conflict between the Seleucids and the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt erupted once again over the control of southern Syria, Palestine, and Phoenicia. Both Egypt and the Seleucid state, which had been significantly weakened by decades of warfare and interdynastic rivalries, appealed to Rome for intervention, but the Roman Senate refused to become involved. In 173 BCE, Antiochus paid in full the remainder of the war indemnity imposed on his father by Rome in 188 BCE. In 169 and again in 168 BCE, he invaded and occupied Egypt, but an ultimatum from Rome forced him to withdraw, although he managed to retain his control over southern Syria.

Antiochus organized a military campaign against the Arsacids of northeastern Iran, who were pushing their territorial possessions westward, threatening Seleucid-held Media in present-day western Iran. Before moving against the Arsacids, however, Antiochus prepared the ground for his invasion by appointing his trusted confidant and minister Timarchus as satrap of Babylonia. Once he assumed the leadership of his campaign, Antiochus marched against Armenia and imposed his suzerainty over the Armenian king Artaxias. Antiochus then led his forces to Elam in southwestern Iran to plunder the treasures of the temple of Nanaia. In Parsa (Persis) in southern Iran, the people revolted against him and forced the Seleucid monarch and his army to withdraw from their province. He then went to Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan in western Iran), the capital of Media, where he injured himself after falling from his chariot. Antiochus IV died at Gabae (present-day Isfahan) in central Iran in

164 BCE. The planned invasion of Parthia never materialized.

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus III; Antiochus V Eupator; Seleucus IV Philopator; *Peoples:* Seleucids

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Antiochus V Eupator

The ninth king of the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled parts of Iran and Mesopotamia from its capital at Antioch in Syria (present-day southern Turkey). Antiochus V ascended the throne at the age of nine after his father, Antiochus IV, died in Iran in 164 BCE. Because of his young age, Antiochus V was aided by a guardian named Lysias. The position of the new Seleucid dynast was exceedingly weak. Since the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BCE when Antiochus III had suffered a devastating defeat and been forced to agree to the humiliating Treaty of Apamea (188 BCE), Rome had emerged as the supreme power in Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. Antiochus III not only had renounced all his claims to any territorial possessions north and west of the Taurus Mountains in southern Asia Minor but had also agreed to send his son, the future Antiochus IV, as a hostage to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity; and surrender his fleet and elephants. With this defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. At the time Antiochus V ascended the throne in 164 BCE, Demetrius, the son of Seleucus IV and a cousin of the nine-year-old Antiochus V, was living as a hostage in Rome. Many viewed Demetrius as the legitimate heir to the Seleucid throne. In 162 BCE he escaped from Rome and was welcomed in Syria as the legitimate king. Antiochus V and his regent, Lysias, were detained and subsequently executed.

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus IV Epiphanes; Demetrius I Soter;

Peoples: Seleucids

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Antiochus VII Sidetes

A king of the Seleucid dynasty who ruled from 138 to 129 BCE. Antiochus VII tried to recover the lost provinces of the Seleucid state in Mesopotamia and Iran but failed. He was the son of the Seleucid monarch Demetrius I (r. 162–150 BCE) and the brother of Demetrius II (r. 145–140 BCE). In 141 BCE, Demetrius II was defeated and captured by the armies of the Arsacid monarch Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE). The humiliated Seleucid king was paraded in various cities of the Arsacid kingdom before he was transported to Hyrcania in northern Iran on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea, where he was received with kindness and generosity by Mithridates I. The Arsacid monarch arranged a marriage between his daughter Rhodogune and Demetrius II. Meanwhile in Syria, Cleopatra Thea, the wife and queen of Demetrius II, ascended the throne as regent. A usurper named Tryphon, however, threatened to seize the throne. To save the Seleucid state, Antiochus VII returned to Syria in 139 BCE, seized the throne, and married his brother's wife, Cleopatra Thea. In 138 BCE, he defeated the pretender Tryphon. Next he moved against Jerusalem, which he captured in 135/134 BCE.

Coin of the Seleucid monarch Antiochus VII, from Tyre in present-day Lebanon. The son of Demetrius I Soter and the brother of the ill-fated Demetrius II Nicator who had been defeated and captured by the Arsacid/Parthian monarch, Mithridates I, Antiochus VII restored Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and Media to the Seleucid state, but he was eventually defeated and killed by the Arsacid Parthian monarch Phraates II. (www.BibleLandPictures.com/Alamy Stock Photo)

With Palestine under his rule, Antiochus VII shifted his focus to the east with the goal of restoring Seleucid rule in Iran. In 130 BCE, while the Arsacid (Parthian) monarch, Phraates II, was quelling the threat posed by the invading nomadic groups in the east, Antiochus VII attacked and seized Babylonia, defeating Arsacid armies in three separate military encounters. With winter arriving, Antiochus divided his army and scattered its units in several cities in western Iran. The high-handed and oppressive attitude of these army units, who demanded food and supplies, caused the populace to revolt against Antiochus VII (Justin: XXXVIII.10). Wishing “to feel out” his enemy, Phraates II sent an envoy to negotiate a peace agreement (*Diodorus*

Siculus: XXXIV/XXXV.14.15). Antiochus responded that he was willing to conclude a treaty if the Arsacid monarch would release his brother Demetrius from captivity, withdraw from the provinces he had seized, and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.14.15). Phraates rejected these demands. Instead, he released Demetrius, who had been living in Hyrcania since his defeat and capture. The Arsacid monarch probably hoped that the return of Demetrius II to Syria would force Antiochus to call off his campaign and return to Syria to defend his throne against his brother. Phraates II also placed an army in the field. Against the advice of his officials, who pleaded with him to avoid a hasty attack, Antiochus marched against the much larger Arsacid force. When the two armies joined battle, Phraates II defeated Antiochus, who was killed on the battlefield (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.15.16). Though victorious, Phraates II organized a magnificent funeral for the fallen Seleucid monarch and sent his body to Syria in a silver casket. Phraates also married Demetrius II's daughter, who had accompanied Antiochus VII to Iran (Justin: XXXVIII.10).

The victory of Phraates II over Antiochus VII put an end to Seleucid rule in Iran. With the death of Antiochus, who had left five children behind, Syria was engulfed in a civil war. After his impressive victory over the Seleucids, Phraates II intended to advance to Syria. He was diverted to the east, however, by the renewed threat posed by nomadic groups, who had overrun the southern regions of Central Asia as well as present-day northern Afghanistan. In 128 BCE, accompanied by Greek prisoners whom he had captured in his battle against Antiochus, Phraates engaged the invading nomads. As the battle was joined, the Greek prisoners of war, who were fighting for Phraates as mercenaries, defected to the enemy, causing chaos among the Arsacid forces (Justin: XLII.1). In the midst of the confusion and mayhem that followed, Phraates II was killed on the battlefield. He was succeeded by his uncle Artabanus I (Justin: XLII.2.1).

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Artabanus II; Mithridates II; *Peoples:* Arsacids; Scythians; Primary Documents: Document 23

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Apame/Apama

Daughter of Spitaman (Spitamanes), a Sogdian dignitary; the wife of Seleucus I, the founder of the Seleucid dynasty; and the mother of Antiochus I, the second Seleucid dynast. Spitaman was a provincial governor during the reign of the last Persian Achaemenid king, Darius III. After the death of Darius III and the collapse of the Achaemenid state, Spitaman joined the resistance against Alexander the Macedon, who had invaded the eastern provinces of the Achaemenid Empire. In 329 BCE, Spitaman led a revolt against Alexander in Bactria and Sogdiana and laid siege to Samarqand (Maracanda). Alexander sent an army under the command of his general, Pharnuches, to suppress the rebellion, but Spitaman inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Macedonian force, which was dispersed after suffering heavy losses. When Alexander hurried to Samarqand to relieve the city, he discovered that Spitaman had already departed for Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan. In 328 BCE Spitaman attacked Bactria, but the governor of the province, Artabazus, who had sworn loyalty to Alexander, managed to repulse him. Spitaman was finally defeated by Alexander's general Coenus. After this defeat Spitaman was betrayed by his Scythian allies, who murdered him and sent his head to Alexander.

In 324 BCE, a year before his death, Alexander organized a mass wedding at Susa in present-day southwestern Iran, where he ordered his generals to marry Iranian wives. Alexander himself married Barsine, Darius's eldest daughter, and Parysatis, the youngest daughter of Ochus (Artaxerxes III, who ruled from 359 to 338 BCE), thus linking himself with both branches of the Persian Achaemenid royal family (Arrian: 7.4). The Macedonian general Seleucus was ordered to marry Apame, the daughter of Spitaman. The "marriage ceremonies were in the Persian fashion: chairs were set for the bridegrooms in order of precedence, and when healths had been drunk the brides entered and sat down by their bridegrooms, who took them by the hand and kissed them" (Arrian: 7.5). After the end of the ceremony, "all the men took their wives home, and for every one of them

Alexander provided a dowry" (Arrian: 7.5). Alexander hoped that these marriages would create unity between the Macedonians and the Iranians. The Seleucid dynasty was born from the marriage between the Iranian Sogdian Apame and the Macedonian Seleucus, who emerged as the founder of the Seleucid state after 312 BCE. Seleucus I and Apame had a son, Antiochus, who would succeed his father as Antiochus I Soter, the second monarch of the Seleucid dynasty.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius III; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Bessus; Spitaman

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Demetrius I Soter

A king of the Seleucid Empire, which ruled Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran and Asia Minor. Demetrius I Soter ruled from 162 to 150 BCE. He lived for a time as a hostage in Rome before escaping to Syria in 162 BCE and seizing the throne. Demetrius was the son of Seleucus IV, the nephew of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and a cousin of the nine-year-old Antiochus V. In 162 BCE, Demetrius escaped from Rome and was welcomed in Syria as the legitimate king. The reigning monarch, Antiochus V, and his regent, Lysias, were detained and subsequently executed.

Silver tetradrachm of the Seleucid monarch Demetrius I Soter. The son of Seleucus IV Philopator, Demetrius was sent to Rome by his father as a hostage. He escaped from Rome after the death of his father and seized Syria in 162 BCE. Though he defeated the rebellious general Timarchus, and crushed a Jewish rebellion in Palestine in 160, he was himself defeated and killed by the pretender Alexander Balas, who enjoyed the support of Rome and the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt. (Yale Gallery of Art)

When the Seleucid king Antiochus III the Great was defeated by the Romans in the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BCE, he renounced all his claims to any territorial possessions west and north of the Taurus Mountains in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He also agreed to pay a heavy war indemnity; surrender his fleet and elephants; and send his third son, the future Antiochus IV, as a hostage to Rome. In 175 BCE the successor to Antiochus III, Seleucus IV, sent his own son Demetrius to Rome as the new Seleucid hostage and brought his brother Antiochus home. When Antiochus IV died in 164 BCE, he was succeeded by his nine-year-old son, Antiochus V, who was aided by a

regent, a general by the name of Lysias. Demetrius, the older son of Seleucus IV, viewed by many as the legitimate heir to the Seleucid throne, had remained in Rome as a hostage. In 162 BCE, Demetrius escaped from Rome and was welcomed in Syria as the legitimate king. Antiochus V and Lysias were ousted and executed. Demetrius also defeated the unpopular governor of Babylonia, Timarchus, who had rebelled against the throne. For this, Demetrius received the title "Soter" (Protector) from the Babylonians (Appian: 11.8.47). After these victories, Demetrius was recognized by the Roman Senate as the legitimate king. Demetrius is best known for his brutal suppression of a Jewish uprising in 160 BCE. He was eventually challenged and killed on the battlefield by the pretender Alexander Balas, who enjoyed the support of Rome, Egypt, and Pergamum. Humiliated by the Romans and torn internally by the rivalry between various contenders to the throne, the Seleucid state began to disintegrate, with the faraway eastern provinces of the empire, namely Parthia in present-day northeastern Iran and Bactria in present-day northern Afghanistan, slowly detaching themselves from Antioch, the seat of the Seleucid monarchy.

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Alexander Balas; Demetrius II Nicator; Seleucus IV Philopator; *Peoples:* Seleucids

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Demetrius II Nicator

A king of the Seleucid monarchy, which ruled Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. Demetrius II Nicator ruled from 145 to 139 BCE and again from 129 to 125 BCE. A son of the Seleucid monarch Demetrius I Soter, Demetrius fled to the island of Crete after his father was

defeated and killed by Alexander Balas in 150 BCE. In 147 BCE, with support from the king of Egypt, Ptolemy VI, Demetrius organized an army of Cretan mercenaries and attacked Syria to regain his father's lost throne. In 145 BCE, Demetrius defeated the usurper Alexander Balas and ascended the throne as the king of Syria. The reign of Demetrius II corresponded with the rapid expansion of the Parthian domains under the dynamic leadership of the Arsacid (Parthian) king Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE). Mithridates defeated the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in Bactria (present-day northern Afghanistan) and seized "the satrapy of Turiva and that of Aspionus" (Strabo: 11.11.2). Mithridates I then pushed westward and conquered Media sometime in 148 or 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Seleucia-on-Tigris in Babylonia in 141 BCE. Before he could complete his conquest of Mesopotamia, however, Mithridates I was forced to return to Central Asia to pacify the invading Scythian nomads, who had breached the northeastern frontiers of his kingdom. In the absence of their king, Arsacid commanders continued their military operations in southern Mesopotamia. Between 139 and 132 BCE, they captured the semi-independent state of Elymais in present-day southwestern Iran.

The victories of Mithridates I forced Demetrius II to respond by invading southern Mesopotamia. This campaign proved to be disastrous. Demetrius was defeated and captured by Arsacid forces in 139 BCE. The humiliated Seleucid king was first paraded in public and then transported to Hyrcania (modern-day Gorgan) in northern Iran, where he was received with kindness by Mithridates I. Mithridates arranged a marriage between his daughter Rhodogune and Demetrius, but the Seleucid monarch was determined to return to Syria. He therefore tried twice to escape Iran and reach Syria, but on both occasions he was captured. Meanwhile back in Syria, Cleopatra Thea, the wife and queen of Demetrius II, had ascended the throne as regent. A usurper named Tryphon, however, emerged as a pretender to the throne. To save the Seleucid state, the younger brother of Demetrius II, Antiochus, returned to Syria in 139 BCE. He ascended the throne as Antiochus VII and married his brother's wife, Cleopatra Thea. In 138 BCE Antiochus defeated Tryphon before moving against Jerusalem, which he captured in 135/134 BCE. With Palestine under his rule, Antiochus shifted his focus to the east. He was determined to restore Seleucid rule in Iran. In 130 BCE, Antiochus attacked and defeated Parthian armies, recapturing Mesopotamia and parts of Media. In response, the Arsacid monarch Phraates II sent a delegation to negotiate a peace agreement. Antiochus VII responded that he would be willing to cease hostilities and conclude a treaty if the Arsacid monarch would release his brother Demetrius II from

captivity, withdraw from the provinces the Parthians had seized, and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord. Phraates rejected these demands and instead released Demetrius II, allowing him to return to Syria. Phraates probably hoped that the return of Demetrius would result in discord and civil war between the two brothers. With winter approaching, Antiochus divided his large army and scattered its various units across several cities in western Iran. The arrogant and oppressive behavior of these army units, who demanded food and supplies from the local population, caused the populace in a number of urban centers to revolt against Antiochus VII (Justin: XXXVIII.X). Phraates II used this golden opportunity to march against Antiochus, defeating and killing the Seleucid monarch on the battlefield. Meanwhile, Demetrius II returned to Syria and regained both his queen and his throne, but he never managed to reestablish his control east of the Euphrates River. The defeat suffered by Antiochus VII at the hands of the Arsacid monarch Phraates II put an end to Seleucid rule in Iran. Merely four years after he had returned to Syria, Demetrius II was assassinated.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus VII Sidetes; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Seleucids

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Seleucus I Nicator

A Macedonian officer in the army of Alexander the Great and the founder of the Seleucid dynasty. Seleucus I Nicator was the son of Antiochus, a commander in the army of Phillip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander. Seleucus's mother was Laodice (Justin: XV:IV). Seleucus participated in Alexander's campaigns against the last Persian Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, and led the Macedonian army in the battle of the Hydaspes against the Indian prince Porus in 326 BCE. In 324 BCE, a year before his death, Alexander organized a mass wedding party at Susa in present-day southwestern Iran and ordered his generals to marry Iranian wives. He hoped that these marriages would create unity between the Macedonians and Iranians. Seleucus was ordered to marry Apame (Apama), a daughter of the Sogdian dignitary Spitaman (Spitamenes). Spitaman had served as the governor of Sogdiana, the region lying between the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya). The Seleucid dynasty "sprang from this Macedonian-Iranian union" (Bickerman: 4). After Alexander died in Babylon in 323 BCE, his generals fought over control of the vast and short-lived empire he had left behind. Initially Seleucus supported Perdiccas, who served as the regent to Alexander. When Perdiccas invaded Egypt, which was ruled by another of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy, Seleucus accompanied him. In Egypt, Seleucus joined a group of officers who rebelled against Perdiccas and assassinated the Macedonian commander. In 321, Seleucus became the governor of Babylon. Initially he was closely allied with Antigonus, the powerful ruler of Asia Minor. In 316, however, Seleucus broke his alliance with Antigonus and fled to Egypt, where he sought refuge with Ptolemy. From 316 to 312 BCE, Seleucus served under Ptolemy. Seleucus initiated the process of organizing a coalition of four kings who opposed Antigonus, the ruler of Asia Minor, who dreamed of imposing his rule over Alexander's empire. This coalition included Ptolemy, the ruler of Egypt; Lysimachus, the ruler of Thrace; and Cassander, the master of Macedonia and Greece (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXI.1. 2–4b). In 312 BCE Ptolemy and Seleucus defeated Demetrius, the son of Antigonus, in the Battle of Gaza in southern Syria. A short time later with support from Ptolemy, Seleucus marched to Babylon and captured it in 312 BCE. This marked the beginning of the Seleucid era.

A commander in the armies of Alexander the Great, Seleucus I Nicator founded the Seleucid kingdom, centered in Syria and Iran in 312 BCE. (Jupiterimages)

In response to Seleucus's conquest of Babylon, Antigonus dispatched two armies, the first under the command of his general, Nicanor, and the other under the leadership of his son, Demetrius, to force Seleucus out of Babylon, but they both failed. In 305 BCE, Seleucus assumed the title of king and established his capital at Seleucia-on-Tigris in present-day southern Iraq. He also used Babylon as a territorial base to extend his rule over Iran. He seized Media and Susiana and soon extended his control as far east as Bactria in northern Afghanistan. Media Atropatene (present-day Azerbaijan) in present-day northwestern Iran and Chorasmia in Central Asia remained independent under their own kings. Seleucus also failed to capture the Indus River basin, which was ceded to Chandragupta, the founder of the powerful Maurya dynasty based in northern India. After the end of his campaign in the east, Seleucus returned west in

303 BCE. He joined the coalition of Ptolemy of Egypt, Lysimachus of Thrace, and Cassander of Macedonia, which was formed to contain and defeat the powerful and ambitious Antigonus. In 302 Seleucus arrived in Asia Minor, and in 301 BCE Seleucus and Lysimachus marched against Antigonus and defeated him at Ipsus in Phrygia in west-central Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) in the Battle of the Kings. Antigonus was killed, and his son Demetrius fled (Justin: XV:IV). The victors then divided the kingdom of Antigonus. Seleucus received Syria, although Ptolemy of Egypt had already occupied the southern part of the country, known as Coele Syria. This move caused a conflict between the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria that continued for over a century. In 300 BCE, Seleucus transferred the Seleucid capital from Seleucia-on-Tigris to a new capital, Antioch, in northern Syria (present-day southern Turkey), which he built on the shores of the Orontes River. In 294 Antiochus, the son of Seleucus and Apame, fell in love with his stepmother, Stratonice. Seleucus allowed his son to marry his stepmother. He also appointed Antiochus as the ruler of the empire's eastern provinces and bestowed upon him the title of co-regent. Seleucus became increasingly entangled in the internal conflicts that were tearing asunder the ruling house of Lysimachus, the ruler of Thrace, who had ordered the execution of his son, Agathocles. In the winter of 281 BCE, Seleucus defeated and killed Lysimachus at Corupedium in western Asia Minor. As he crossed into Europe to consolidate his rule over Macedonia, he was murdered by the son of Ptolemy of Egypt, Ptolemy Ceraunus, who had been passed over by his father as successor to the Egyptian throne. Seleucus I was succeeded by his son and co-regent, Antiochus.

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus I Soter; Apame/Apama; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Seleucids

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Seleucus II Callinicus

The fourth king of the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled vast territories in Iran, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. Seleucus II Callinicus ruled from 246 to 225 BCE. He was the son of Antiochus II Theos (261–246 BCE) and his first queen, Laodice. In 253 BCE, Antiochus II separated from Laodice and married Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II of Egypt. In 246, Antiochus II separated from his second queen and decided to return to his first wife. Laodice, however, poisoned Antiochus II and proclaimed her eldest son, Seleucus, as the new king. Another son of Antiochus II, Antiochus Hierax, was sent to Asia Minor to rule as the governor for his brother. As Seleucus II ascended the throne, Antiochus's two queens, Laodice and Berenice, began a civil war. This conflict came to an end when the agents of Laodice killed Berenice. When the news of the murder of Berenice arrived in Egypt, her brother, King Ptolemy III, raised an army and invaded Seleucid territory, while his navy landed on the coasts of Asia Minor. With Ptolemy III on the offensive, Seleucus II played defensive and bid for his turn in Asia Minor. When the king of Egypt returned home, Seleucus II recaptured northern Syria and the western provinces of Iran. In 236/235 BCE, however, Seleucus II was challenged by his brother Antiochus Hierax, who was now supported by their mother, Laodice. The two brothers fought in the Battle of Ancyra (modern-day Ankara) around 235 BCE, where Seleucus was defeated.

Consequently, the Seleucid domains were divided between Antiochus Hierax, who emerged as the ruler of Asia Minor north and west of the Taurus mountain range, and Seleucus II, who held on to Syria, Mesopotamia, and western Iran. The Seleucid interdynastic rivalries and wars allowed the provinces of the Seleucid state in eastern Iran to break away and proclaim their independence. Thus, sometime between 250 and 239 BCE the governors of Parthia and Bactria revolted and proclaimed their independence.

In 238 BCE, a Scythian leader named Arsaces led his people, the Parni or Aparni, in the invasion and conquest of Parthia. The self-proclaimed independent ruler of Parthia, Andragoras, was killed, and his small kingdom emerged as the new home and operational base for Arsaces. With the conquest of Parthia, the dynasty of Arsaces called the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or as those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used when referring to them and their empire. A short time after the conquest of Parthia, Arsaces marched west and seized Hyrcania (Justin: XLI.4). The

acquisition of Parthia and Hyrcania allowed Arsaces to raise a large army to defend himself against a possible attack from the Seleucids to the west and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom to the east. After Theodotus I, the founder of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, died, Arsaces I made peace and entered into an alliance with his son, Theodotus II (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II invaded eastern Iran to punish the Parthians, Arsaces I scored a victory against the Seleucid monarch, a momentous milestone that the Parthians would observe "with great solemnity as the commencement of their liberty" (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II was forced to return west to quell disturbances, Arsaces I used the respite as an opportunity to lay the foundation of the Parthian government, "levy soldiers, fortify castles, and secure the fidelity of his cities" (Justin: XLI.5.1). He built a city called "Dara," which was designed and built in such a way that it did not need a "garrison to defend it" (Justin: XLI.5.1–2). In 226 BCE, Seleucus II died suddenly after falling from his horse. He was succeeded by his son Seleucus III.

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Seleucus I Nicator; Seleucus III Soter; *Peoples:* Seleucids

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Seleucus III Soter

The fifth king of the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled vast territories in Iran, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. Seleucus III ruled for two years between 225 and 223 BCE. He was the son of the Seleucid monarch Seleucus II Callinicus. Seleucus III ascended the Seleucid throne after his father fell from his horse and died. Shortly after he was proclaimed king, Seleucus III invaded Asia Minor with the goal of recovering Pergamum in present-day western Turkey, which had been seized by his cousin, Attalus I. When the battle was joined, Attalus defeated the Seleucid army under the command of the Seleucid general

Andromachus. This humiliating defeat forced Seleucus III to organize a second campaign against Attalus I, this time under his own command. In 223 BCE, while in Phrygia in western Anatolia, Seleucus III was murdered before engaging the enemy. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Antiochus III.

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus III; Seleucus II Callinicus; *Peoples:* Seleucids

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Seleucus IV Philopator

The seventh king of the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled vast territories in Mesopotamia and Iran. Seleucus IV Philopator succeeded his father, Antiochus III, in 187 BCE. Seleucus IV inherited an empire in decline. His father had been defeated by the Romans in the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BCE. In the Treaty of Apamea signed in 188 BCE, Antiochus III had renounced all his claims to any territorial possessions north and west of the Taurus Mountains of southern Asia Minor. He had also agreed to send his son, the future Antiochus IV, as a hostage to Rome; pay a heavy war indemnity; and surrender his naval fleet as well as his elephants. Upon ascending the Seleucid throne, Seleucus IV sent his son Demetrius to Rome as a hostage and requested the Romans to allow his brother, Antiochus, to return to Syria. When Antiochus arrived in Athens on his way back to Syria, Seleucus IV was murdered by Helliodorus, one of his court officials. Helliodorus, who had intended to seize the throne, was himself murdered, and Antiochus IV was installed on the throne in 175 BCE (Appian: XI.VIII.45).

See also: *K&Q, Seleucid:* Antiochus III; Antiochus V Eupator; Demetrius I Soter; *Peoples:* Seleucids

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Legendary Kings, Heroes, and Villains

OVERVIEW ESSAY

Iran's legendary history played an important role in shaping Iranian identity and lending legitimacy to the dynasties of pre-Islamic Persia, particularly the Sasanians, who ruled from 224 to 651 CE. Iran's legendary heroes and villains were mentioned for the first time in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, as mythological luminaries. They were later transformed into historical figures, including kings, queens, princes, princesses, and army commanders of the two great legendary dynasties of Iran, namely the Pishdadians and the Kayanids or Kayanians. The villains who appeared for the first time as evil and demonic figures in the *Avesta* were later converted into similar historical personages, portrayed as either tyrannical and bloodthirsty usurpers or as the royal bigwigs, dignitaries, and generals of the kingdom of Turan, a powerful legendary state whose armies frequently invaded Iran and on several occasions brought the Iranian state to the verge of extinction.

The best example of transition from an Avestan luminary to a historical figure is provided by Yima, who through a metamorphosis reappears in legendary accounts as Jamshid, a powerful king of the Pishdadian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, Yima is introduced as the son of Vivanghvant, a descendant of the first man, Gaya Maretan (Gayomard). Yima is described as the most brilliant and glorious of men yet born. He is credited with bringing his people health and freedom from hunger and thirst. Yima brings good weather and likewise looks after the flocks and herds under his people's care. However, he appears to have come under the sway of flattery and become susceptible to lies and falsehoods. His divine glory (*khvarnah*), which previously had enabled his good deeds, flees from him in the shape of a bird alighting from his shoulder.

As the Avestan account was transformed into a historical narrative, the Avestan Yima emerged as Jamshid, one of the greatest of ancient

Iran's legendary kings of the Pishdadian dynasty. Jamshid rules men and demons for over 616 years and 6 months. Like Yima, Jamshid looks after his people by teaching them skills important to their prosperity and livelihood. He instructs them in metalworking, masonry, spinning, and weaving, as well as the mining of precious metals, the production of spices, and the making of perfumes. Jamshid's greatness in Iranian legendary history is such that he is credited with establishing Nowruz as the Iranian New Year and constructing Persepolis, the magnificent palace complex of the Persian Achaemenid kings. The name of Persepolis in Persian is, in fact, Takht-e Jamshid, or Throne of Jamshid.

The heroic adventures and the extraordinary accomplishments of Jamshid and other legendary heroes and villains were recorded and preserved in verse by Iran's greatest epic poet, Ferdowsi, in his masterpiece the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]. Written around 1000 CE, the *Shahnameh* has played a central role in shaping the cultural identity of the people of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. By preserving the historical memory of his people and highlighting the spirit of their heroic past, Ferdowsi imbued his countrymen with a strong sense of pride in their cultural, artistic, and literary achievements. By assembling and marshaling the legends and folktales of ancient Persia, which were slowly being forgotten, Ferdowsi provided his readers with a window through which they could journey back to their ancient history and encounter its many heroes and heroines. Through the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi also revitalized the Persian language. His book encapsulates the story of the pre-Islamic dynasties of Greater Persia, beginning at the dawn of history and with the appearance of the first man, Gayomard. The *Shahnameh* recounts the establishment of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty and from there continues all the way to the invasion of Persia by Muslim Arabs and the fall of the Persian Sasanian Empire in 651 CE.

Afrasiyab

The king of the legendary kingdom of Turan and the shrewd, brutal, and formidable foe of the kings of Iran beginning with Manuchehr and ending with Kay Khosrow. In the Zoroastrian holy scripture the *Avesta*, Afrasiyab (Afrasiab) appears as Frangrasyan, "the Turanian murderer" (*The Zend-Avesta:* Aban Yasht, 41–42). He is included in a list of the legendary heroes who worship Anahita, the goddess of waters. In "his cave under the earth" Frangrasyan offers a sacrifice of "a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs" to the goddess of waters, Aredvi Sura Anahita, begging of her a boon so that he may

“seize hold of that Glory, that is waving in the middle of the sea Vouru-Kasha and that belongs to the Aryan people, to those born and to those not yet born, and to the holy Zarathustra” (*The Zend-Avesta:* Aban Yasht, 41–42). Anahita, however, refuses to grant him her blessing.

In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi presents Afrasiyab as the king of Turan who fights the kings of Iran for 200 years. Afrasiyab plays an important role in several stories of the *Shahnameh.* He ascends the throne of Turan during the reign of the legendary king of Iran, Manuchehr (Manōchihr). Afrasiyab organizes a large and strong army and invades and occupies Iran, trapping Manuchehr and his army in the mountains of Tabarestan (present-day Mazandaran in northern Iran). Manuchehr is forced to fight numerous battles before he can liberate his kingdom from the Turanian ruler. Upon the death of Manuchehr, his son Nowzar ascends the throne of Iran. Weak, self-indulgent, greedy, gluttonous, and incompetent, Nowzar alienates his commanders and government officials as well as the ordinary people. Despite repeated warnings from his dignitaries, the king fails to address the growing chaos in his kingdom. With Iran in shambles, the shrewd and opportunistic Afrasiyab marches his army against Nowzar. Despite their heroism on the battlefield, the Iranians are defeated and humiliated, and their king Nowzar is captured. The humbled Iranian king is brought to Afrasiyab. After reminding his prisoner of the vendetta between the kings of Iran and Turan, Afrasiyab decapitates Nowzar with his own sword. Though Nowzar has two sons, the Iranian dignitaries refuse to allow them to ascend the throne, as they are believed to lack the sufficient training and qualities to rule. With the royal line coming to a sudden end, the court dignitaries select an old member of the Iranian nobility, Zab/Zav (Uzava of the *Avesta*, whose name is pronounced Zāb or Zāv), as the new ruler. When Zab dies, his son Garshasp ascends the throne. Both Zav and Garshasp, however, fail to restore the glory and power of the Iranian state. With the death of Garshasp, the throne of Iran is vacant. Once again the Turanians, under the command of Afrasiyab, use the weakness of the Iranian state to attack. At this juncture, the Iranian leaders appeal to the great hero Zal (pronounced as Zāl) to lead the resistance against the foreign invaders. The aging Zal appoints his son Rostam as the commander of Iran’s army. But both Zal and Rostam are painfully aware that aside from a strong army and a capable general, the country also needs a new leader who possesses *farr* (divine glory) and the sufficient qualifications to rule. They therefore select a descendant of the great king Fereydun, who lives in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran. This young and capable man is Kay Qobad (Kavi Kavata of the *Avesta*), who ascends the throne of Iran as

the founder of the Kayanian dynasty.

The conflict between Iran and Turan intensifies during the reign of the Kayanian dynasty. The principal cause of friction between the two warring kingdoms is the murder of the Iranian crown prince Siyavash (Siyavarshana or Siyavakhsh of the *Avesta* and Pahlavi texts) by Afrasiyab. The legendary king of Iran Kay Kavus (Kavi Usa of the *Avesta*) designates his son Siyavash as his crown prince. The wife of Kay Kavus and the queen of Iran is Sudabeh, who falls in love with her stepson, Siyavash. Sudabeh attempts to seduce Siyavash, but the Iranian crown prince rejects her advances. Siyavash's rebuff enrages Sudabeh, who accuses Siyavash of raping her. Convinced of the truthfulness and honesty of his queen and outraged by the nature of her accusation, Kay Kavus orders his son Siyavash to undergo an ordeal that would demonstrate his guilt or innocence. This test of innocence requires the accused to ride a horse through a large bonfire. If the accused is innocent, he will emerge out of the fire unscathed. However, if he is guilty, the fire will consume him as he rides through it. Siyavash accepts the trial. He rides through the fire and survives the ordeal unharmed. Recognizing the slanderous nature of his queen's allegations, Kay Kavus orders his henchmen to execute her. Siyavash, however, intercedes and begs his father to forgive his queen and spare her life. Kay Kavus, who remains enamored with and enchanted by his queen, forgives her.

Soon Afrasiyab, at the head of a Turanian army, invades Iran. Kay Kavus appoints his son Siyavash as the commander of the Iranian forces. After a long campaign, the Iranians manage to defeat the Turanians and force them to sue for peace. The victorious Siyavash negotiates a peace treaty with the Turanians, which requires Afrasiyab to send 100 hostages to the Iranian court. Afrasiyab agrees to the terms of the treaty and sends the hostages to the Iranian court. The news that his son has concluded a peace treaty with the hated Afrasiyab enrages the Iranian king, Kay Kavus. The king sends a message to Siyavash demanding that he continue the successful military campaign against the Turanians until their king, Afrasiyab, has been captured or killed. Siyavash refuses to violate the treaty he has signed and decides to leave Iran. He travels to Turan, the historical enemy of Iran, and seeks the protection of Afrasiyab, the very king he had defeated.

At first Afrasiyab welcomes the Iranian crown prince, who is renowned for his courage, valor, and splendor, and showers him with royal honors and gifts. Afrasiyab also arranges a marriage between Siyavash and his daughter Farangis. The warm relationship between Siyavash and Afrasiyab deteriorates, however, as a result of intrigues by members of Afrasiyab's own family, particularly the Turanian

king's brother Garsivaz. Garsivaz accuses Siyavash of maintaining secret contact with his father and claims that the Iranian prince covets the Turanian throne for himself. Alarmed by his brother's allegations, Afrasiyab sends an army against Siyavash, who surrenders peacefully. Siyavash is then brought in bondage to the royal court of Turan, where he is beheaded by the order of Afrasiyab. Afrasiyab also orders the murder of his own daughter, Farangis, but the intercession of his wise minister, Piran, saves the life of the princess and her unborn son, Kay Khosrow.

Kay Khosrow is raised among shepherds, with distant supervision from the Turanian dignitary Piran, who has saved his and his mother's lives. With assistance from several Iranian heroes and dignitaries, including the greatest of Iran's legendary heroes, Rostam, Kay Khosrow and his mother escape to Iran and are welcomed by the king, Kay Kavus, who designates his grandson as his heir apparent. Kay Khosrow grows up to become an intelligent, handsome, and gifted young man. To avenge his father's death, Kay Khosrow organizes an army and marches against Afrasiyab, his maternal grandfather. The Iranians and Turanians fight numerous battles before the Iranian army, led by Kay Khosrow, defeats the Turanians and kills their king, Afrasiyab. According to Zoroastrian texts, Afrasiyab is defeated and killed by Kay Khosrow on the shores of Lake Chao Chast on the day of Khordad in the month of Farvardin, or the sixth day of the first month of the Iranian calendar, which corresponds with the celebration of Greater Nowruz (New Year). Kay Khosrow completes his victory by destroying the Turanian temple of idols, which is located on the shores of the same lake.

Aside from his involvement in long and fierce battles against the legendary kings of Iran, Afrasiyab also plays a prominent role in several other stories of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]. For example, Afrasiyab appears in the romantic love story of Bijhan and Manijheh as the king and father who refuses to allow his daughter, Manijheh, to marry the Iranian hero, Bijhan. Accompanied by his friend and companion Gorgin, the legendary Iranian warrior, Bijhan enters the territory of Turan. Encouraged by Gorgin, Bijhan manages to meet the beautiful Manijheh. Bijhan and Manijheh fall in love, and the Turanian princess convinces the Iranian knight to meet her in her bedroom, where the two lovers are discovered by Afrasiyab. Afrasiyab orders Bijhan to be imprisoned in a deep well, which is covered by a large and heavy rock. Manijheh manages to sneak some food and water through a crack in the rock. Meanwhile, Gorgin returns to Iran. Embarrassed by the entire episode, he is forced to share the news of Bijhan's capture. The only individual capable of rescuing Bijhan is Iran's greatest legendary hero, Rostam, who agrees to travel to Turan.

Rostam finds Bijhan and lifts him out of the well, and after Bijhan and Manijheh are reunited, Rostam brings them back with him to Iran.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Kay Khosrow; Rostam; Siyavash

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Arash

Arash is one of the greatest of ancient Iran's legendary heroes. An early mention of him appears in the Zoroastrian holy book the *Avesta*, which describes him as the archer Erekhsha, he of the swiftest arrow among the Aryans:

> We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star; who flies towards the sea Vouru-Kasha, as swiftly as the arrow darted through the heavenly space, which Erekhsha, the swift archer, the Arya amongst the Aryas whose arrow was the swiftest, shot from Mount Khshaotha [Mount Damavand in northern Iran?] to Mount Hvanvant [Mount Bamian from which the Balkh river springs]. (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Tir Yasht, 6, 37)

In Pahlavi texts, Erekhsha appears as "Arish Shivātir" or "Arish of the swift arrow," the best and most accomplished archer in the Iranian army during the reign of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 95n2). When Manuchehr (Minōchihr), the king of Iran, is forced to make peace with his greatest enemy, Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, it is stipulated that the best of Iran's archers "should ascend Mount Damavand and from thence discharge an arrow towards the east; and that the place in which the arrow" falls "should form the boundary" between the two kingdoms of Iran and Turan (*The Zend-*

Avesta, Part II: 95n2). Arash volunteers to climb the mountain and discharge his arrow toward the east. The arrow of the great archer travels from dawn until noon and falls on the banks of the Oxus River, or Amu Darya (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 95n2). Meanwhile, upon releasing his arrow the body of Arash disintegrates, and those who search for his remains return empty-handed, managing only to trace his bow. According to one Pahlavi text, this momentous event takes place on the day of Khordad, or the sixth day of Farvardin, the first month in the Iranian calendar, the most auspicious date in the entire calendar. The anonymous author of the Pahlavi text *Mah-e Farvardin Ruz-e Khordad* [The Month of Farvardin the Day of Khordad] states that on the sixth day of Farvardin, King Manuchehr, together with Arash Shivatir of the swift arrow, reclaimed the Iranian lands from Afrasiyab the Turanian who had invaded Iran (Kia: 8).

After the fall of the Sasanian dynasty in 651 CE, the myth of Arash survived. Abu Rayhan Biruni, an Iranian scholar of the Islamic era, linked the story of Arash to the feast of Tiragan (Tirgan), which is celebrated on the day of Tir (i.e., the 13th day of each month) in the month of Tir, the fourth month in the Iranian calendar. Biruni wrote:

> On the 13th, or Tir-Roz, there is a feast Tiragan, so called on account of the identity of the name of the month and the day. Of the two causes to which it is traced, one is this, that Afrasiyab after having subdued Eranshahr (Iran), and while besieging Minocihr [Manuchehr] in Tabaristan [the Caspian province of Mazandaran] asked him some favor. Minocihr complied with his wish, on the condition that he (Afrasiyab) should restore to him a part of Eranshahr as long and as broad as an arrow-shot. On that occasion there was a genius present, called Isfandarmadh [Avestan Spenta Armaiti (holy or beneficent devotion), which appears as Spendarmad in Middle Persian and Esfand in New Persian, is the protector of earth. Esfand is also the twelfth month of the year in the Iranian calendar]; he ordered to be brought a bow and an arrow of such a size as he himself had indicated to the arrow-maker, in conformity with that which is manifest in the *Avesta.* Then he sent for Arish, a noble, pious, and wise man, and ordered him to take the bow and to shoot the arrow. Arish stepped forward, took off his clothes, and said: "O king, and ye others, look at my body. I am free from any wound or disease. I know that when I shoot with this bow and arrow I shall fall to pieces and my life will be gone, but I have determined to sacrifice it for you." Then he applied himself to the work and bent the bow with all the power God had given him; then he shot, and fell asunder into pieces. By the order of God the wind bore the arrow away from the

> mountain of Ruyan and brought it to the utmost frontier of Khurasan between Farghana and Tabaristan; there it hit the trunk of a nut-tree that was so large that there had never been a tree like it in the world. The distance between the place where the arrow was shot and that where it fell was 1,000 Farsakh. Afrasiyab and Minocihr made a treaty on the basis of this shot that was shot on this day. In consequence people made it a feast-day. (Biruni: 205, 25)

In a section of his *History* devoted to the festivals of Zoroastrians, the historian Gardizi wrote that on the 13th day of the month of Tir, the Zoroastrians celebrated a festival called Tirgan, for it was on this day that the king of Iran, Manuchehr, made peace with Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, after they agreed that the arrow of an archer should set the boundary between the two kingdoms (Gardizi: 518–519). The archer Arash discharged an arrow that traveled from the mountains of Ruyan (one of the Caspian provinces of northern Iran) and landed on a mountain between Farghaneh (present-day Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) and Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan) (Gardizi: 518). Gardizi added that on this day the Zoroastrians bathed and cleansed themselves. They also cooked a dish that contained wheat mixed with fruits (Gardizi: 518–519).

The story of Arash the archer is repeated in the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] of Ferdowsi. According to Ferdowsi, Manuchehr, the king of Iran, is engaged in a fierce battle against the armies of Iran's sworn enemies, the Turanians, in the region of Tabarestan, which corresponds with the present-day northern Iranian province of Mazandaran, located on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and the northern slopes of the Alborz mountain range. The Turanians, led by their king Afrasiyab, have surrounded the Iranian army. At this point, both sides agree to end the war and conclude a peace treaty. According to the peace agreement, the boundary between Iran and Turan will be established by an archer who will discharge his arrow in an easterly direction from the top of a mountain. Wherever the arrow lands will be recognized as the boundary between the two kingdoms. Thus, the brilliant archer Arash volunteers to discharge his arrow as far east as he can. As the sun rises on the horizon, he climbs Mount Damavand and, upon reaching its peak, discharges his arrow, which travels long and far before it lands at the end of the day on the banks of the Oxus River (Amu Darya). As Arash had predicted before climbing the mountain, his body disintegrates upon releasing his arrow.

There are numerous versions of the legend of Arash, many claiming different locations for the mountain from which the arrow is

discharged and for the place where it lands. Most sources agree that the arrow is discharged from somewhere in northern Iran (either Mount Damavand or a town or fortress in the Caspian province of Ruyan). Despite their differences on where the arrow lands, however, these sources mostly concur that it is somewhere in northern Afghanistan or Central Asia, the most popular site being a walnut tree on the banks of the Oxus, the present-day border of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with Afghanistan.

In the 20th century the courageous, noble, and selfless figure of Arash, who gave his life to liberate his homeland from foreign domination, emerged as one of the exemplary models of Iranian nationalism. In 1959, the Iranian poet Siyavash Kasrai (1927–1996) popularized the legend of Arash in his much-admired and widely acclaimed poem *Arash-e Kamangir* [Arash the Archer]. This modern retelling of the legend of Arash celebrates the highly accomplished archer as a national hero who sacrificed his life to liberate his country and people from tyranny and foreign occupation.

See also: *Ancient Provinces:* Alborz; *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Manuchehr; Pishdadian

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Bahman

A king of the Kayanian dynasty in the national epic of Greater Iran. Bahman appears as the grandson of King Goshtasp and the son of Esfandiyar, the Kayanian crown prince who is killed by the legendary hero Rostam.

Bahman is not mentioned in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, as a king of the Kayanian dynasty. There are, however, several references to Bahman in Pahlavi texts, including the *Dinkard* and

Bundahishn. The historian Tabari identifies him as the son of Esfandiyar, the crown prince of the Kayanian monarch "Beshtasp" (i.e., Goshtasp) who invades Sistan and avenges his father by killing Zal (Dastan), Zal's son Rostam, Rostam's son Faramarz, and Rostam's brother Zavareh (Azvareh) (Tabari: 2.484). Tabari calls Bahman "Ardashir Bahman" and associates him with the Persian Achaemenid king Artaxerxes I. The Greek sources gave Artaxerxes I the surname of Macrocheir, while his surname in Latin was Longimanus (Longhand) because his right hand was apparently longer than his left. Tabari also attributes to Ardashir Bahman the Persian title of *deraz dast* (longhand) (Tabari: 2.484). Tabari also identifies Bahman as the father of two sons, Dara-ye Bozorg (Darius the Great) and Sasan, and two daughters, Farang and Bahmandokht (Tabari: 2.484–485). Another historian, Gardizi, also refers to Bahman as "Ardashir the Long Arm," "the best of Persian kings" who invades Sistan to avenge the death of his father, Esfandiyar (Gardizi: 54–55). Gardizi's account, however, differs from Tabari's in that his Bahman arrives in Sistan after Rostam has already died. Rostam's father, Zal, meets with Bahman but expresses his disapproval of the king's behavior. Bahman fights Rostam's son, Faramarz, but despite his best efforts fails to defeat his adversary (Gardizi: 55). Tabari's account is repeated, albeit with some variations by other Muslim historians. For example, Ibn al-Balkhi states that Bahman had five children, whereas Tabari only mentions four (Ibn al-Balkhi: 54).

Illustration from *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the national epic of the Persian-speaking people, composed by the epic poet Abul Qasem Ferdowsi. (Detroit Institute of Arts/Founders Society purchase, Edsel B. Ford Fund/Bridgeman Images)

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Bahman appears as the

son of Esfandiyar, the crown prince of King Goshtasp of the Kayanian dynasty. Esfandiyar is killed by Rostam, Iran's greatest legendary hero, on the battlefield. Before he dies, Esfandiyar blames his father, Goshtasp, for his own death and pleads with Rostam to raise his son, Bahman, as his own. Rostam promises Esfandiyar that he will adopt Bahman as his own son. Bahman grows up in Sistan. After he is trained and educated by Rostam, Bahman returns to the Kayanian court and ascends the throne upon the death of his grandfather, King Goshtasp. Once on the throne, Bahman raises an army and invades Sistan to avenge the death of his father, Esfandiyar. The hero Rostam who had killed his father has already died, but Rostam's father, Zal, remains the ruler of Sistan. In the first attack, Zal is captured and put in bondage. The kingdom of Sistan is devastated, and its magnificent treasury is plundered by Bahman and his army. Next, Bahman fights Faramarz, the son of Rostam. When the battle is joined, Faramarz is defeated and captured after three days and three nights of fierce fighting. Faramarz is subsequently executed.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Esfandiyar; Faramarz; Goshtasp; Rostam; Zal

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Esfandiyar

Esfandiyar (Esfandiar) is a great hero in the legendary history of Iran. He is the son and the crown prince of the legendary king of the Kayanian monarch, Goshtasp (Vishtaspa of the *Avesta*). Goshtasp is the first king to welcome the Iranian prophet Zarathustra to his court. Soon he converts to Zoroastrianism, making it the official religion of his kingdom. His queen, courtiers, and high officials follow their royal master and convert to the new religion. Aside from King Goshtasp, the greatest and the most enthusiastic supporter of Zarathustra is Prince Esfandiyar, who is designated as the successor to his father. In return for his enthusiastic support, Zarathustra blesses Esfandiyar and provides the young prince with a talisman that is designed to protect him from any harm. Having been blessed by Zarathustra and enjoying the protection of a talisman given to him by the great prophet convinces the brave, strong, and courageous Esfandiyar of his own invincibility. Esfandiyar's rise to power and prominence coincides with an invasion of Iran by the armies of Turan. In the first battle between the two powers, the Iranians suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Turanians. The Iranian king Goshtasp loses several of his sons as well as his brother, Zarir, on the battlefield. Desperate to rescue his kingdom from foreign occupation, Goshtasp appeals to his son Esfandiyar for assistance. In return for leading the Iranian army to victory in the upcoming campaign against the Turanians, Goshtasp promises his ambitious crown prince the throne of Iran. Overjoyed by the prospect of seizing the throne, Esfandiyar agrees to lead the Iranian army against Arjasp, the king of Turan. When the battle is joined, Esfandiyar and his army score an impressive victory. Esfandiyar returns to his father expecting to receive the crown of Iran, but King Goshtasp is not willing to abdicate. Instead, the Kayanian monarch dispatches his crown prince on a mission to promote and propagate Zoroastrianism. Esfandiyar accomplishes the task of spreading the teachings of the great prophet Zarathustra and returns home once again with the hope that he would ascend the throne as the new king of Iran. Sensing the rising tension with his father, Esfandiyar decides to leave the royal palace for a hunting expedition together with his son, Bahman. In his absence, the courtiers who are aware of Goshtasp's resentment of Esfandiyar accuse the crown prince of sedition. They claim that Esfandiyar intends to overthrow the king and replace him on the throne. Meanwhile, Esfandiyar is warned against returning to his father's palace, but he refuses to abandon his dream of capturing the throne. Once he has returned to the court, however, Esfandiyar is accused by his father of sedition and conspiracy. Goshtasp orders his henchmen to detain and imprison his crown prince, who is sent in chains to a faraway fortress. With his ambitious son out of the picture, Goshtasp embarks on a journey to

promote Zoroastrianism, which he had adopted as the religion of his kingdom. The Turanians, who have received intelligence about Esfandiyar's imprisonment, use the golden opportunity handed to them by Goshtasp to attack Iran. They sack the city of Balkh, killing a large number of Zoroastrian priests and destroying the fire temple in which they were performing their religious rituals. They also kill the father of Goshtasp, the former monarch Lohrasp, and take the daughters of the reigning king as hostages back with them to Turan. Once again, Goshtasp panics and sends his wise minister, Jamasp, to free Esfandiyar and implore him to return and lead the Iranian army against the Turanians. And once again, Goshtasp promises that he will relinquish the throne if Esfandiyar assumes the leadership of the kingdom's army. At first Esfandiyar refuses to return but, under relentless pleas from Jamasp, agrees to lead the army in its next campaign against the Turanians. Once again, Esfandiyar triumphs over the Turanian king Arjasp, who flees the battlefield. Esfandiyar returns to his father's court with the news of his great victory over the Turanians, expecting his father to place the Kayanian crown on his head. King Goshtasp, however, reminds his crown prince that his victory was not complete, because the two princesses of the royal family, Homai and Behafarid, remain in captivity. Esfandiyar agrees to rescue his sisters. In a difficult journey to the fortress where his sisters are held, Esfandiyar endangers his life repeatedly, facing ferocious beasts and dragons. Once he has reached the fortress, he resorts to a ruse. By disguising himself as a traveling merchant who is merely interested in selling his goods, Esfandiyar finds his way into the well-guarded fortress. During his stay at this fortress, he wins the confidence of King Arjasp. Esfandiyar convinces the unsuspecting Turanian monarch to allow him to organize a large banquet on the roof of the royal palace. The fires lit for the banquet are used as a signal to Esfandiyar's brother, Pashutan (Pashotan), to storm the fortress. As Pashutan moves against the walled city, Esfandiyar seizes the royal palace from within, killing the Turanian monarch. With Arjasp eliminated, the victorious Esfandiyar opens the gates of the fortress to his brother and the Iranian army. With Turan defeated and its king killed, Esfandiyar is prepared to replace his father and ascend the throne of Iran. Goshtasp organizes a large banquet celebrating his son's victory over the Turanians, but he disappoints Esfandiyar by refusing to utter any hints about the immediate future of the throne. Angry, outraged, and deeply wounded, Esfandiyar appeals to the queen, Katayun. Katayun pleads with Esfandiyar to remain patient and not betray his father, advice that enrages the Kayanian crown prince. Meanwhile, the cunning and devious Goshtasp, who is not willing to abandon the throne, asks his minister, astrologer, and confidant,

Jamasp, to probe into the horoscope of Esfandiyar and unveil the secret of how his crown prince would die. Once he has examined the horoscope of Esfandiyar, Jamasp informs the king that his crown prince will die at the hands of the great hero Rostam, who lives in Zabol, the capital of Sistan, in present-day eastern Iran. Thus, when Esfandiyar appears in front of his father demanding that he be allowed to ascend the throne, Goshtasp informs him that he will become the king when he has defeated and killed the great hero Rostam, the son of Zal, the ruler of Sistan. Goshtasp claims that Rostam is an ambitious and popular knight who does not obey royal authority and should therefore be eliminated because he poses a threat to the security of his kingdom. Esfandiyar is not deceived by his father. He accuses Goshtasp of trying to get rid of him by forcing an unnecessary confrontation with Rostam. Despite his doubts and reservations, however, Esfandiyar decides to carry out his father's order. He marches to Zabol, the seat of power for the kingdom of Sistan, which is ruled by the legendary hero Zal and his son, Rostam. Esfandiyar sends a message to Rostam that he has traveled to Sistan to take the great warrior back with him to King Goshtasp as his captive. Rostam is shocked by the message from Esfandiyar, because until then he had never felt anything but respect and admiration for the Kayanian crown prince. To appease Esfandiyar and avoid a violent confrontation, Rostam adopts a conciliatory approach. With kindness and humility he responds to Esfandiyar by sending a message in which he begs for a meeting so they can resolve their differences peacefully. Esfandiyar is, however, unmoved: he has become doggedly determined to carry out his father's order. Despite repeated pleas from Rostam, Esfandiyar insists that either Rostam return with him as a prisoner to King Goshtasp's capital or that they fight on the battlefield to resolve their conflict. Rostam, a proud hero, cannot allow himself the indignity of being treated as a captive and being dragged in chains to King Goshtasp, where an unpredictable fate awaits him. Left with no other alternative, Rostam prepares himself for battle with Esfandiyar. In the first confrontation between the two knights, Rostam quickly realizes that despite his experience in fighting and defeating numerous demons, dragons, and warriors, he is no match for the brilliant crown prince, whose exceptional talents dazzle the warriors on both sides. Aside from Rostam and Esfandiyar, the knights accompanying the two warriors also become engaged in fighting. The battles between the two warring parties are bloody and heart wrenching. Princes and knights from both sides fall and die on the battlefield, including two of Esfandiyar's sons who had traveled with their father to Zabol. Rostam and his legendary horse Rakhsh are also gravely wounded from Esfandiyar's sharp arrowheads, which pierce body armor designed to

protect the knight and his steed. Rostam tries desperately to reciprocate by shooting arrows at Esfandiyar's body, but they prove to be ineffective because the body of the Kayanian prince is invincible, for he has been blessed by the prophet Zarathustra.

Illustration from *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the masterpiece of the Persian epic poet Abul Qasem Ferdowsi, depicts the legendary Iranian prince Esfandiyar confronting the mythical bird Simorgh. A prince of the legendary Kayanian dynasty, Esfandiyar was killed on the battlefield by Iran's greatest legendary hero Rostam when Simorgh instructed Rostam to make an arrow from branches of a tamarisk (*gaz*) tree and aim it at Esfandiyar's eyes. (Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma/Wentz-Matzene Collection, 1936/Bridgeman Images)

Desperate to save his son from humiliation and death at the hands of Esfandiyar, Rostam's father, Zal (pronounced as Zāl) appeals to the legendary bird Simorgh for assistance. As an infant, Zal was abandoned by his father Sam (pronounced as Sām). Zal only survives after Simorgh carries him to her nest, where she raises him as one of

her chicks. Zal is finally recovered by his father and brought back to Sistan, where he is appointed as the crown prince. Before leaving Simorgh, however, the bird gives him a handful of his feathers, telling him to burn a feather whenever he is in desperate need of assistance and support. Zal has already burned one of the feathers when his wife was pregnant with Rostam and had difficulty giving birth to her child. Upon burning one of the feathers, Simorgh appears and rescues both the mother and the child by performing a Caesarean section. Now for the second time, Zal burns a feather of Simorgh, and when the bird appears, he explains the dilemma that he and his son confront. Simorgh immediately attends to Rostam's wounds and removes Esfandiyar's arrows from his body. She then uses her healing techniques to revive Rostam's horse, Rakhsh. By moving her feathers on the wounds of Rostam and Rakhsh, she stops the bleeding and cures their gashes, tears, and cuts. Once she has healed their injuries, Simorgh reveals the secret of fighting and defeating Esfandiyar. The Kayanian crown prince can only be killed if Rostam cuts a branch of a tamarisk tree and converts it to an arrow by flattening it and then soaking it in wine, arming it with a sharp arrowhead, attaching feathers to its end, and finally discharging it at the eyes of Esfandiyar. The next day at dawn Rostam, armed with his newly designed arrow, appears at the camp of Esfandiyar and calls on the warrior prince to meet him face-to-face. Remaining convinced of the necessity of reconciliation, Rostam pleads with Esfandiyar to end the hostilities. He goes as far as promising the prince that he is willing to travel to the court of King Goshtasp, apologize for any past missteps, and submit himself to any punishment that he may deserve. Esfandiyar, however, repeats the same threatening and insulting statements he had uttered in their previous encounters. Recognizing that any reconciliation with Esfandiyar is an impossibility, Rostam draws his new arrow and discharges it against the prince, targeting his eyes. Struck by the arrow, Esfandiyar falls from his horse and dies shortly after. Before he dies, however, he makes Rostam promise that he will raise and train his son, Bahman, as his own son. Esfandiyar also blames his father Goshtasp for his death.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Goshtasp; Rostam; Simorgh; Zal

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York: Penguin Classics, 2007.

Faramarz

Faramarz is a hero and a warrior in Greater Iran's legendary history. A son of Rostam, the greatest of Iran's national heroes, Faramarz participates in the campaigns of his father. He commands the Iranian army fighting the Turanian king Afrasiyab, the fiercest enemy of Iran, who is also responsible for the murder of his own son-in-law and Iran's crown prince, Siyavash. Faramarz defeats and kills one of Afrasiyab's allies, Varazad, and subsequently seizes the son of Afrasiyab, Sorkha, hence playing an important role in the victory of Iran over Turan. Faramarz continues to participate in various military campaigns and engagements, accompanying his father and serving as a military leader. When Rostam is killed, Faramarz avenges the death of his father by attacking and capturing the city of Kabul and executing its king, who had hatched the plot to murder Iran's greatest hero. Faramarz is then dispatched by Kay Khosrow, the ruler of Iran, to a campaign against India.

Though the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi does not include the story of the conquest of India by Faramarz in his *Shahnameh*, the account of that campaign forms the core of another book, *Faramarz Nameh* [The Book of Faramarz]. The story of Faramarz's accomplishments and adventures is also included in *Banu Goshasp Nameh* [The Epic of Banu Goshasp]. There are various and contradictory accounts of Faramarz's death. Some state that he was killed by Bahman, the son of the Kayanian crown prince Esfandiyar, while others maintain that Faramarz and Bahman concluded a peace treaty. At least one source maintains that Faramarz's end comes in Kashmir after he falls from his horse. According to this account, the body of the deceased hero is transported to his home province of Sistan, and his remains are buried next to his father, Rostam.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Esfandiyar; Kay Khosrow; Rostam; Siyavash

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Faranak

In Iranian mythology, Faranak is the mother of the hero Fereydun. A daughter of the king of the Scythians, Faranak marries Abtin (Aptin), a descendant of the great king Jamshid, a legendary monarch of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty. Soon after Faranak gives birth to their son Fereydun, Abtin becomes aware of the evil and murderous intentions of the tyrannical King Zahhak, who has seized the throne after killing the reigning monarch, King Jamshid. Seeking to avoid a similar fate for himself, Abtin tries to flee the king's henchmen but is hunted, captured, imprisoned, and eventually murdered.

To save her son from the fate visited upon his father, Faranak flees with Fereydun to a distant farm, where she begs the owner to allow her son to receive nourishment by drinking the milk of a beautiful cow named Barmaye. The owner agrees to offer refuge to Faranak and her son. When the boy reaches the age of three, the evil King Zahhak and his henchmen discover Faranak's hideout, but before their arrival, Faranak and Fereydun escape, this time finding refuge in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran. Zahhak, who is haunted by fear of being dethroned and imprisoned, continues to search for Faranak and her child. Enraged by his failure to capture them, the cruel king exacts his revenge by killing the kind and beautiful cow Barmaye who had acted as the second mother to Fereydun.

Fereydun lives in hiding until he is 16 years old, when he comes down from the mountains to visit his mother. The reunion between the mother and the son allows Fereydun to inquire from his mother about his father. In response, Faranak reveals the tragic story of the family. After hearing about his father, Fereydun vows to exact revenge and punish the brutal and tyrannical Zahhak for his heinous crimes.

Fereydun is destined to emerge as the leader of a popular revolution led by the blacksmith Kaveh. Kaveh revolts against the tyrant Zahhak after the king's henchmen detain his sons. The demonic monarch murders young men and feeds their brains to the serpents that have grown out of his shoulders. Thus, his title in Persian mythology is "Mardush" (Serpent Shoulder). His endless demand to sacrifice innocent human beings to feed his hungry serpents outrages his subjects, who out of fear of retribution do not protest his monstrous crimes. Kaveh, however, refuses to allow his sons to be sacrificed without voicing his outrage. The blacksmith walks into the palace of Zahhak and protests the detention of his sons. After listening to Kaveh's protest, Zahhak orders the blacksmith's sons to be released but demands that in return for this display of royal mercy and compassion, Kaveh sign a proclamation that declares the cruel and brutal king to be a just and upright ruler. This demand enrages Kaveh,

who tears up the document and storms out of the palace. As he leaves the palace, Kaveh places his blacksmith's leather apron on a long pole to use it as his banner. Crowds gather around Kaveh, and his protest quickly turns into a mass uprising. The rebellious blacksmith and his supporters march to the Alborz Mountains seeking Fereydun, who is hailed as the legitimate king. Fereydun emerges from his hiding place, raises an army, and marches against Zahhak, whom he defeats. Zahhak is dragged in chains to a cave in the summit of Mount Damavand in northern Iran. After overthrowing Zahhak, Fereydun rescues the sisters of King Jamshid, Arnavaz and Shahrenaz, who were being held hostage by Zahhak, and marries them. Thus, Fereydun exacts his revenge on Zahhak for the death of his father while at the same time removing an evil and oppressive king from the throne and ushering in a new era of prosperity and justice.

The narrative above is based on the story of Fereydun as presented by the epic poet Ferdowsi in his *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]. The character of Fereydun was, however, much older than the *Shahnameh.* Fereydun first appears in the Zoroastrian holy book, the *Avesta*, as Thraetaona, "the heir of the valiant Athwya clan," who offers a sacrifice in Varena, located according to some scholars in present-day Gilan or Mazandaran on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 61). Thraetaona begs the goddess Anahita to give him a boon so he can overcome and defeat Azhi Dahaka, the "three-headed, the three-mouthed and the six-eyed" monstrous dragon who "has a thousand senses." The *Avesta* also describes Azhi Dahaka as "the most powerful, fiendish Druj [the lie], that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu [the evil spirit] created against the material world, to destroy the world of good principle" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 61–62). The Azhi Dahaka of the *Avesta* worships Anahita in a castle in the land of Bawri, identified by some scholars as Babylon. The victorious Thraetaona defeats the three-headed and six-eyed monster Azhi Dahaka and drags him in chains to a cave in the summit of Mount Damavand in the Alborz mountain range of northern Iran. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Thraetaona is transformed to Fereydun, and Azhi Dahaka is metamorphosed to the tyrant king Zahhak.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Fereydun; Kaveh; Zahhak

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Farangis

In Iranian legendary history, Farangis is the eldest daughter of Afrasiyab, the king of Turan and the most formidable enemy of Iran. She is also the wife of the Kayanian crown prince Siyavash. The child born from the marriage between Farangis and Siyavash is Kay Khosrow, who eventually emerges as the third king of the Kayanian dynasty. The life of Farangis is inexorably linked to the tragic life of her husband, Siyavash, and to the tumultuous and heroic career of their son, Kay Khosrow.

Although he is the crown prince, Siyavash never ascends the Kayanian throne. Instead, because of a conflict with his father Kay Kavus, Siyavash is forced to flee his homeland for Turan, whose monarch, Afrasiyab, is viewed as the most dangerous enemy of Iran. At first Afrasiyab welcomes Siyavash and showers him with honors and gifts. Afrasiyab also arranges a marriage between the Kayanian prince and his daughter Farangis. Soon, however, the warm relationship between Siyavash and Afrasiyab deteriorates as a result of intrigues by jealous courtiers and members of Afrasiyab's own family, particularly the Turanian king's brother Garsivaz. Garsivaz claims that the Iranian prince covets the Turanian throne for himself. In response, Afrasiyab sends an army against Siyavash, who surrenders without a fight. The Kayanian prince is then brought in fetters to the royal court of Turan, where he is beheaded by order of Afrasiyab. Afrasiyab also plans to murder his own daughter, Farangis, but the intercession of his influential adviser Piran saves the life of the Turanian princess, who gives birth to a boy named Kay Khosrow shortly after the murder of her husband.

Kay Khosrow and his mother, Farangis, eventually escape to Iran and are welcomed by Kay Kavus, who designates his grandson as the crown prince. Kay Khosrow grows up in the court of his grandfather to become a handsome, brave, and well-educated prince. To avenge his father's death, Kay Khosrow raises an army and marches against his maternal grandfather, Afrasiyab. The Iranians and Turanians fight numerous campaigns before Kay Khosrow manages to defeat and kill

Afrasiyab. The victorious Kay Khosrow returns home from this successful military campaign and after ascending the throne, he rules for 60 years.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Kay Kavus; Kay Khosrow; Siyavash

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Fereydun

Fereydun is a hero and a king in the legendary history of Greater Iran. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, he appears as Thraetaona, "the heir of the valiant Athwya clan" who offers a sacrifice in Varena (present-day Mazandaran on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 33). Thraetaona begs the goddess of waters, Anahita, to give him a boon so he can overcome and defeat Azhi Dahaka, "the three-headed, the three-mouthed and the six-eyed" dragon who "has a thousand senses" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.33). Thraetaona is celebrated as a son of the heroic Athwya, who defeats the dragon Azhi Dahaka, the "three-jawed and triple-headed, six-eyed, with thousand powers, and of mighty strength" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.8).

In the *Avesta*, Azhi Dahaka is further described as "the most powerful, fiendish Druj [the lie], that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu [evil spirit] created against the material world, to destroy the world of good principle" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 33–34). The Azhi Dahaka of the *Avesta* also worships Aredvi Sura Anahita, the goddess of waters, in a castle in the land of Bawri, which has been identified by some scholars as Babylon. The victorious Thraetaona defeats the three-headed and six-eyed

monster Azhi Dahaka and drags him in chains to a cave on the summit of Mount Damavand, north of present-day Tehran.

In later Pahlavi texts such as the *Bundahishn*, Thraetaona appears as Ferēdun the Āspiyān, the son of Purtora the Āspiyān and a descendant of Yima (Jamshid) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.7). In these sources, Ferēdun is identified as the hero who exacts vengeance for Yima and vanquishes Azi Dahak but cannot kill the defeated enemy. According to *Shayast La-Shayast*, Ferēdun intends to slay the demonic Dahak, but the great god Ahura Mazda orders him not to, "for the earth will become full of noxious creatures" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Shayast La-Shayast, 20.18). Thus, Ferēdun captures Dahak and drags him in chains to a cave on the summit of Mount Damavand in northern Iran (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 29.9, 31.8; *Pahlavi Texts, Part III:* 27.38). Ferēdun, who rules for 500 years, has three sons: Salm, Tuj (Tur), and Ērich (Iraj) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 34.6, 31.9). Salm and Tuj conspire and murder their younger brother Ērich and his two sons, but Ferēdun keeps the daughter of Ērich in hiding. From this daughter a girl is born, and though her mother is also killed, the female baby is raised by Ferēdun, and eventually after 10 generations a prince called Manushchihr (Manuchehr) is born (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.11). In exacting revenge for the death of Ērich, Manushchihr kills both Salm and Tuj (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.12).

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Thraetaona, the Avestan vanquisher of Azhi Dahaka, appears as Fereydun, who fights and defeats Zahhak (the Avestan Azhi Dahaka), a tyrant with monster-like features and attributes. Fereydun's mother is Faranak and his father is Abtin, a descendant of the legendary king of the Pishdadian dynasty, Jamshid, who appears as Yima in the *Avesta.* In the *Avesta*, the birthplace of Fereydun is Varena. In the Islamic era, some authors, such as Maràshi, claimed that Fereydun was born in Varak, a village in the district of Larijan in Tabarestan (present-day northern Iranian province of Mazandaran). Other authors, such as Tabari, wrote that he was born in Damavand, north of Tehran and in close proximity to Larijan (Maràshi: 105).

Fereydun's father, Abtin, is murdered by the evil and tyrannical King Zahhak, who has seized the throne after killing the reigning monarch, Jamshid. To save her son from the fate visited upon his father, Fereydun's mother, Faranak, flees with Fereydun to a farm, where the boy survives by drinking the milk of a cow named Barmaye. When the boy reaches the age of 3, Faranak and Fereydun are forced to seek refuge in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran, where Fereydun lives in hiding until he is 16 years old.

A revolt erupts in response to the cruelty and brutality of Zahhak.

The leader of the rebellion is the blacksmith Kaveh, who locates Fereydun in his mountain hideout. Fereydun comes out of hiding and marches against Zahhak. After a fierce battle, Fereydun defeats the evil king. Zahhak is brought in chains to a cave on the summit of Mount Damavand in the Alborz mountain range of northern Iran.

After overthrowing Zahhak, Fereydun rescues the sisters of King Jamshid, Arnavaz and Shahrenaz, who were held as hostage by Zahhak, and marries them. Thus, Fereydun exacts his revenge on Zahhak for the death of his father while at the same time removing an evil and oppressive king from the throne and ushering in a new era of prosperity and justice. By the age of 50, Fereydun has three sons. The mother of the first two sons is Shahrenaz, while the third has been born to Arnavaz. Searching for three princesses who could marry his sons, Fereydun dispatches an ambassador to the court of the king of Yemen, who has three daughters, and asks for their hands for his three sons. In response, the king requests that Fereydun's three sons travel to his country so he can meet his future sons-in-law. The three sons of Fereydun meet with the king of Yemen, who consents to the marriages. As his sons and their brides are returning to the court, Fereydun decides to test their characters. Thus, he turns himself into a fire-breathing dragon and waits for them along the road. When Fereydun's first son sees the roaring dragon blocking the road, he flees quickly, declaring that a wise man should never become engaged in a confrontation against such a monstrous and dangerous dragon. The second son snatches an arrow, places it on his bow, and approaches the dragon, saying that he is not frightened by the sight of a terrifying monster and will fight it if he must. Unlike his two older brothers, the third son walks fearlessly up to the dragon and demands that he remove himself from the road because he is confronting the three mighty sons of King Fereydun. Fereydun, having tested the character and courage of his sons, disappears and returns home.

Illustration depicts the legendary king Fereydun receiving the envoy from his two sons, Salm and Tur. Fereydun is best known in Greater Iran's legendary history as the hero who defeated the tyrant Zahhak (Dahak) and liberated his people from the yoke of injustice and oppression. Fereydun divided his kingdom among his three sons, giving Rum to Salm, Turkestan to Tur, and Iran and India to his youngest son, Iraj. A conflict erupted among the three sons, which resulted in the murder of Iraj by his two brothers. (San Diego Museum of Art/Gift of Edwin Binney III/Bridgeman Images)

Once the three sons and their new brides arrive home, Fereydun bestows a name on each of his sons. The oldest, who reacted with prudence toward the dragon, is named Salm. The second son, who displayed bravery and courage, is called Tur, and the third son, who had demonstrated extraordinary prudence and courage, is named Iraj. After consulting with his astrologers and confidants, King Fereydun divides his vast kingdom among his three sons. Salm receives the lands of the west, principally Rum (Byzantium) or Asia Minor; Tur is allotted the eastern provinces, the lands of the Turks (Turan); and Iraj

receives the middle kingdom, which is centered in Greater Iran. This division ignites the jealousy of the two older brothers toward Iraj, for he is believed to have received the best kingdom among the three. Salm writes to his brother Tur and expresses his outrage at the injustice of being the oldest son and yet receiving a faraway land as his royal inheritance. Tur, who shares his older brother's disappointment, rushes to visit Salm. Once together, the two brothers compose a message to their father and dispatch an ambassador to hand-deliver it to Fereydun. In their message they complain about the injustice of receiving kingdoms at the ends of the earth, while Iraj has been bestowed the best kingdom in the world. They demand that their ailing father remove Iraj from the throne of Iran and banish him to a faraway place. After receiving the message from his sons Fereydun is outraged, but he is even more shocked by the response from his youngest son, Iraj, who suggests that he should step down from the throne as a means of appeasing his two older brothers. After further conversation between Iraj and Fereydun, who has by now recognized the evil nature of his two greedy sons, Iraj travels to the camp of his two brothers to negotiate a peaceful resolution to their dispute. Through a letter, Fereydun informs his two older sons that Iraj has decided to abdicate the throne and that his only expectation is that they treat Iraj with kindness and compassion. Instead of receiving their youngest brother with kindheartedness and magnanimity, however, Salm and Tur, who are outraged by the serene composure of Iraj and his popularity among their troops, murder him despite his pleas for mercy. They then send the decapitated head of Iraj to their father, who is devastated by the criminal behavior of his two sons. In the midst of lamentations and mourning for his ill-fated son, Fereydun is informed that Mahafarid, a wife of Iraj, has given birth to a beautiful girl who resembles her father. Fereydun raises the child as his own and, when she reaches the appropriate age, arranges for a marriage between her and one of his nephews. A son is born from this union who is named Manuchehr (Manōchihr). Fereydun appoints Manuchehr as his successor and raises him as an educated and honorable young man. When they hear of the rise of Manuchehr to power and prominence at the royal court, Salm and Tur, who are frightened by the prospect of a confrontation with the young prince, dispatch an ambassador with gifts to express their love for him and convey their regrets and apologies for murdering his grandfather. In response, Fereydun sends a threatening message to his murderous sons, informing them that they will soon meet Manuchehr on the battlefield. Not long after the army of Iran, led by Manuchehr and marching behind the standard of Kaveh, the blacksmith who had revolted against the tyrant Zahhak, clashes with the combined forces

of Salm and Tur. After a long campaign Manuchehr's forces prevail, and Tur is killed on the battlefield. The remainder of the enemy forces retreat to a fortress, but Manuchehr proves to be a relentless fighter and warrior who is not willing to end the battle until and unless he has either captured or killed Salm. This task is accomplished in the next battle between the two armies. The victorious Manuchehr then sends a message to Fereydun informing the great king of his impressive victories. When Manuchehr returns to the court of Fereydun, he dismounts and kisses the ground to greet the great king. Fereydun takes Manuchehr's hand and places him on the throne. Fereydun dies shortly after the victories over Salm and Tur, and Manuchehr ascends the throne as the new king. But the wars between Iran, which is named after Iraj, and Turan, which is named after Tur, continue for several generations. Indeed, the long wars between the two powerful kingdoms form the central theme of the *Shahnameh.*

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Faranak; Jamshid; Kaveh; Zahhak

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Gayomard

Gayomard (Gayomart) is the name of the first man in Zoroastrianism. It is also at times the name of the first king in the legendary history of Greater Iran. His name appears as Gaya Maretan (Mortal Life) in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 13.7, 68.22; *The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Visparad, 21.2). In Pahlavi texts, Gayomard appears as the first man as well as the first king. Gayomard is the primeval and androgynous being, "the pure man" from whom "the whole human race is said to have sprung" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part II:* Dadistan-i Dinik, 2.10, 105n4). He is created by the great god Ahura Mazda in Airyanem Vaejah or Eranvej, the mythical homeland of the Iranian people. Before creating Gayomard, Ahura Mazda brings forth "a sweat upon Gayomard," making "that sweat into the youthful body of a man of fifteen years, radiant and tall" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 3.19), "brilliant and white, with eyes which looked out for the great one" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 24.1). As with all the creations of Ahura Mazda, Gayomard is brought into the world to assist the wise lord in his struggle against the evil spirit Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) and his army of demons.

The magnificence and brilliance of Gayomard draws the attention of Ahriman, who unleashes an army of 1,000 demons under the command of the demon of death and dissolution, Astvihad, against the mortal man (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 3.21). Gayomard's "appointed time," however, has not come, and Astvihad cannot murder him for 30 years (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 3.22). According to the *Bundahishn*, "when the opposition of the evil spirit came, the period of the life and rule of Gayomard was appointed for thirty years," and Gayomard said, "Although the destroyer has come, mankind will be all of my race" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 3.22–23). Thus, Gayomard lives for 30 years in tussle and tribulation before he is finally killed. As he is dying the seed of Gayomard falls to Earth, and that seed is "thoroughly purified by the light of the sun" and after 40 years gives birth to a rhubarb plant (Persian: *rivas*) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 15.1). It is from the stalks of this plant that the first man and woman, Mashya and Mashyanag, come into existence. According to the Pahlavi text *Dadistan-i Dinik*, Gayomard is destroyed but comes back to the world "as a man and a woman" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part II:* Dadistan-i Dinik, 37.82, 105n5). According to Biruni, the evil spirit Ahriman devours Gayomard "from

the head, and when he had come as far as the testicles and the spermatic vessels in the loins, two drops of sperma fell down on the earth," and "out of these drops grew two Ribas bushes … from among which Mesha and Meshana sprang up, i.e. the Persian Adam and Eve," who were called by "the Zoroastrians of Khwarizm" "Mard and Mardana" (Biruni: 107, 39). Mashya and Mashyanag eventually emerge as the ancestors of the human race. In the Zoroastrian tradition, Gayomard is designated as the first human to be raised from death when the day of resurrection arrives. His resurrection is followed by those of Mashya and Mashyanag.

In Greater Iran's legendary history, Gayomard (New Persian: Kayumars or Kiyumars) is not only the first man but also the first king of the world. The historian Tabari wrote that the Zoroastrians considered Gayomard as Adam, the father of humanity (Tabari: 1.9, 1.93). Tabari also stated that the Persians viewed Gayomard as the father of the Iranian people who had a son called Mashi and a daughter, Meyshan or Mishan (Tabari: 1.9). Another author of the Islamic era identified Gayomard as a king who "ruled on a mountain and was called Garshah, the king of the mountain" (Ibn al-Balkhi: 9). The Iranian scholar Biruni wrote that "the Persians call the first man Gayomarth, with the surname Girshah, i.e. 'king of the mountain,' or, as others say, Gilshah, i.e. 'king of the clay.' … People say that his name (Gayomarth) means 'a living, rational, moral being'" (Biruni: 107, 2–107, 8). As a mountain dweller, he lives in caves and dresses himself in animal skins (Mustawfī: 81). In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the Persian poet Ferdowsi describes Gayomard as the first man as well as the first king. He organizes an army under the command of his son, Siyamak, to battle the evil spirit. The evil spirit, however, counters by assembling his own forces, and when the two armies clash, Siyamak is killed on the battlefield. The news of his son's death devastates Gayomard, who mourns for a year. A year after Siyamak's death, the angel Sorush delivers a message from God that Gayomard should cease weeping and mourning and instead organize an army against the evil spirit. Gayomard has raised Siyamak's surviving son, Hoshang/Hushang, and loves him dearly. The grandfather and grandson raise an army and march against the evil spirit and his followers, inflicting a devastating defeat on the army of the demons. As the first ruler of the world, Gayomard introduces law and justice and forces wild animals to submission. After a reign of 30 years, he dies and is succeeded by his grandson Hoshang, who ascends the throne as the founder of the Pishdadian dynasty.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Hushang; Pishdadian; *Religion:* Airyanem Vaejah

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Gēv

Gēv is one of the most prominent heroes of Iran's legendary history. He is a highly respected court dignitary and army commander as well as a highly esteemed dignitary at the courts of Iran's Kayanian monarchs, Kay Kavus and Kay Khosrow. According to the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi, Gēv is descended through his paternal grandfather from Kaveh, the blacksmith who raised the flag of rebellion against the evil and tyrannical King Zahhak. Gēv's father, Godarz, as well as his son, Bijhan (Bejhan), also play a significant role in the legendary

history of Greater Iran.

Gēv is a central figure in the search for Kay Khosrow, who lives with his mother somewhere in the kingdom of Turan, Iran's neighbor and fierce enemy. Kay Khosrow is the son of Prince Siyavash and the Turanian princess Farangis, the daughter of the Turanian monarch Afrasiyab. When Kay Khosrow is born, his father, Siyavash, has already been beheaded by order of the Turanian king. Afrasiyab also plans to murder Kay Khosrow's mother, his own daughter Farangis, but the intercession of his influential adviser, the Turanian dignitary Piran, saves the life of the princess and her child. Kay Khosrow is raised among shepherds, with distant supervision from Piran.

The king of Iran, Kay Kavus, dispatches a search team led by his most trusted commander, Gēv, to locate the king's grandson, Kay Khosrow, and return him to Iran. After seven years of searching and numerous near-death experiences, the capable Gēv finds Kay Khosrow and his mother and transports them back to Iran. Kay Khosrow and Farangis are welcomed by Kay Kavus, who designates his grandson as the crown prince and his successor to the throne. To avenge his father's death, Kay Khosrow organizes an army, which includes such prominent heroes of his time as Rostam and Gēv, and marches against his maternal grandfather, Afrasiyab, the king of Turan. The Iranians and Turanians fight numerous battles. Gēv displays extraordinary courage and wisdom throughout the campaign. In the process he kills the son-in-law of the Turanian king who had murdered his brother, Bahram. Gēv also defeats Goruy Zereh, the murderer of Prince Siyavash on the battlefield. Soon the Iranians, led by Kay Khosrow and the greatest of Iran's legendary heroes, Rostam, manage to defeat and kill the tyrannical Turanian monarch, Afrasiyab.

After the death of Kay Kavus, Kay Khosrow ascends the throne of Iran. At the age of 60, Kay Khosrow shocks his subjects by announcing that he has decided to voluntarily abdicate the throne. Before departing his kingdom, he appoints a member of the Kayanian ruling family, Lohrasp, as his successor and the next king of Iran. Kay Khosrow then bids farewell to the tearful crowd that has gathered to witness the departure of their beloved monarch. In one of the most moving sections of the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the Iranian epic poet Ferdowsi describes the departure of Kay Khosrow, accompanied by five of Iran's most distinguished heroes, including Gēv. The five heroes remain with their king until he meets Sorush, the angel of reckoning and death. Once Kay Khosrow disappears from their sight, Gēv and the other four heroes begin to return home but encounter a snowstorm, which overwhelms and kills them. In the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn*, Gēv appears as Gīw, son of Godarz, and one of the immortals who will assist the promised Zoroastrian savior Saoshyant

in his drive to renovate the universe (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 29.6). The story of Gēv as a knight and a hero may have been grounded in an actual historical personage of the same name who lived during the reign of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Kay Kavus; Kay Khosrow; Siyavash

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Goshtasp

Goshtasp, who appears as Vishtaspa in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, is a king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty and the first monarch to accept the teachings of the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster). The Zoroastrian scriptures praise King Vishtaspa for his wisdom and benevolence. His name means "he who has many horses" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 77n2).

In the Zoroastrian tradition, Vishtaspa is the king who welcomes the prophet Zarathustra to his court. Vishtaspa and his queen, Hutaosa, convert to Zoroastrianism. Vishtaspa agrees to act as Zarathustra's patron and protector. Court officials in the service of Vishtaspa follow their royal master and accept the teachings of the Iranian prophet. The conversion of the royal family and the king's ministers proves to be a turning point in the life and career of Zarathustra. Zarathustra remains at the court of Vishtaspa and establishes close political and familial ties with members of the royal court. For example, one of his daughters, Pouruchista, marries Jamasp, a high official at the royal court.

In the oldest section of the *Avesta*, the Gathas, the prophet Zarathustra begs the great god Ahura Mazda to bestow upon King Vishtaspa the divine grace (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* The Gathas, Yasna, 28.8). In other parts of the *Avesta*, he appears as "the valiant" and "the tall" Kavi Vishtaspa "the Naotaride, the lord of the swiftest horses in these countries" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 101,

105, 108). In the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn*, Vishtaspa, the son of Kay Lohrasp, is associated with two of the three sacred fires of ancient Iran. Vishtaspa is credited with moving the sacred fire of Farnbag (Adur Farnbag) from Khwarazm (on the lower reaches of the Oxus River south of the Aral Sea) to Kabul in present-day Afghanistan as well as establishing the sacred fire of Burzin Mihr (Adur Burzin Mihr) on Mount Revand in Khorasan (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* 17.6, 17.8).

In his *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Ferdowsi portrays Goshtasp as the crown prince of King Lohrasp, a monarch of the Kayanian dynasty. Goshtasp, who has become alienated from his father, leaves his father's kingdom and travels west to the kingdom of Rum. Rum refers to Asia Minor, the core territory of the East Roman Empire. Living anonymously in Rum, Goshtasp fails to find employment. On the brink of impoverishment, he stumbles upon a gracious patrician who invites him to live at his home as a guest of honor. Meanwhile, the king of Rum is searching for a spouse for his eldest daughter, Katayun. In accordance with established tradition, the king throws a lavish reception and invites all the eligible princes and grandees, one of whom he hopes will be picked by his daughter as her future husband. The night before the banquet, Katayun dreams of a prince who will become her husband. When she attends her father's banquet, however, she does not see the prince she had faced in her dream. Recognizing the disappointment of his daughter, the king arranges a second gathering to which he invites a larger number of eligible bachelors, including the sons of high government officials. With the encouragement of the nobleman who is hosting him, Goshtasp attends the second royal reception. As soon as Katayun sets her eyes on Goshtasp, she recognizes him as the man in her dream and hands him the bouquet of flowers she had prepared for her future husband. Unaware of Goshtasp's royal lineage and stunned and angered by the decision of his daughter to select a foreigner as her spouse, the king threatens to kill Katayun. The intercession of courtiers, however, convinces the king to spare his daughter's life. Instead, the enraged monarch expels Katayun from the palace. Banished and without a source of income, Goshtasp and Katayun are forced to live with the patron of Goshtasp, relying solely on the sale of a few pieces of jewelry that Katayun had taken with her at the time of her banishment. The situation changes suddenly, however, when the king of Rum observes the courage and brilliance of Goshtasp in athletic competitions. The king showers favors on Goshtasp, who dares to decry the monarch's callous and heartless treatment of his daughter. The truth about the royal lineage of the Iranian prince is finally revealed when his brother Zarir arrives in Rum. The purpose of Zarir's visit is to convince Goshtasp to return to his father's court. Goshtasp

agrees to return but only with Katayun as his wife. Having discovered the truth about Goshtasp's royal lineage, the king of Rum apologizes to the Kayanian prince and showers his daughter with exclusive gifts and a large dowry. Once Goshtasp arrives at the court of his father, King Lohrasp, the aging monarch places the royal crown on his head and abdicates in favor of his son. From this union between Goshtasp, the crown prince of Iran, and Katayun, the princess of Rum, one of Iran's most brilliant and tragic heroes, Esfandiyar, is born.

It is during the reign of Goshtasp that the prophet Zarathustra arrives at the Kayanian court. Goshtasp welcomes the prophet and eventually converts to his religion. Following their royal master, the court dignitaries and high officials also convert to the new religion. Aside from King Goshtasp, the greatest and the most enthusiastic supporter of Zarathustra is Prince Esfandiyar, who is designated as the heir apparent. In return for his enthusiastic support, Zarathustra blesses Esfandiyar and provides the young prince with a talisman that is designed to protect him from any harm. Meanwhile, Iran is invaded by the armies of Turan. In the first battle between the two powers, the Kayanian army suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Turanians. King Goshtasp loses several of his sons as well as his brother, Zarir, on the battlefield. Desperate to rescue his kingdom from foreign occupation, Goshtasp appeals to his son Esfandiyar for assistance. In return for leading an Iranian army to victory against the Turanians, Goshtasp promises his ambitious crown prince the Kayanian throne. Overjoyed by the prospect of seizing the throne, Esfandiyar agrees to lead his father's army against Arjasp, the king of Turan. When the battle is joined, Esfandiyar and his army score an impressive victory. The victorious Kayanian prince returns to his father's court confident that he will receive the diadem of kingship, but Goshtasp is not prepared to abdicate. Instead, he dispatches his crown prince on a mission to promote and propagate the teachings of the prophet Zarathustra. Esfandiyar accomplishes this mission with flying colors and returns home once again with the hope that he will ascend the Kayanian throne. Sensing the rising tension with his father, Esfandiyar leaves the palace for a hunting expedition accompanied by his son, Bahman. In Esfandiyar's absence, the courtiers accuse the crown prince of sedition. They claim that Esfandiyar intends to overthrow his father and replace him on the throne. Esfandiyar's allies warn him against returning to his father's palace, but he refuses to abandon his dream of capturing the throne. Once he has returned to the court, however, Esfandiyar is accused by his father, Goshtasp, of sedition and conspiracy. Goshtasp orders his henchmen to detain and imprison his crown prince, who is sent in chains to prison. With his ambitious son out of the picture, Goshtasp embarks on a journey to

promote Zoroastrianism, which he has adopted as the religion of his kingdom. The Turanians, who have received intelligence about Esfandiyar's imprisonment, use the golden opportunity handed to them by Goshtasp to attack his kingdom. They sack the city of Balkh, killing a large number of Zoroastrian priests and destroying the fire temple in which they were performing their religious rituals. They also kill the father of Goshtasp, the former monarch Lohrasp, and take the daughters of the king as hostages back with them to Turan. Once again, Goshtasp panics and sends his wise minister, Jamasp, to free Esfandiyar and implore him to return and lead a Kayanian army against the Turanians. Once again Goshtasp promises that if Esfandiyar agrees to assume the leadership of the army, he will relinquish the throne. At first Esfandiyar refuses to return but, under relentless pleas from Jamasp, he returns and commands a Kayanian army against the Turanians. Once again Esfandiyar triumphs over the Turanian king Arjasp, who flees the battlefield. Esfandiyar returns to his father's court with the news of his great victory over the Turanians, expecting his father to place the crown of the Kayanian kingdom on his head. Goshtasp, however, reminds his crown prince that his victory was not complete because the two princesses of the royal family, Homai and Behafarid, remain in captivity. Esfandiyar agrees to rescue his sisters. In a difficult journey to the fortress where his sisters are held, Esfandyiar risks his life, fighting and killing ferocious beasts and dragons. He eventually kills the Turanian monarch Arjasp and liberates his sisters. With the threat from Turan neutralized, Esfandiyar returns home, prepared to replace his father and ascend the Kayanian throne. Goshtasp organizes a lavish banquet celebrating his son's victory over the Turanians but disappoints Esfandiyar by refusing to abdicate in his favor. Deeply wounded by his father's dishonesty, Esfandiyar appeals to the queen, Katayun. Katayun pleads with Esfandiyar to remain patient and not betray his father, advice that enrages the Kayanian prince. Meanwhile, the cunning and devious Goshtasp, who is not willing to abandon the throne, asks his minister, astrologer, and confidant Jamasp to probe into the horoscope of Esfandiyar and unveil the secret of how his crown prince will die. Once he has examined the horoscope of Esfandiyar, Jamasp informs the king that his crown prince will die at the hands of the great hero Rostam, who lives in Zabol, the capital of Sistan in present-day eastern Iran. Thus, when Esfandiyar demands the Kayanian throne from his father again, Goshtasp informs him that he will become the king only after he has defeated and killed Rostam. Esfandiyar is not deceived by his father's scheme. He accuses Goshtasp of trying to get rid of him by forcing an unnecessary confrontation with Rostam. Despite his doubts and reservations, however, Esfandiyar decides to

carry out his father's order and marches to Zabol. In the first confrontation between the two knights, Rostam quickly realizes that despite his experience in fighting and defeating numerous demons, dragons, and warriors, he is no match for the brilliant prince, whose exceptional talents are unmatched. Rostam and his legendary horse Rakhsh are gravely wounded from Esfandiyar's sharp arrowheads, which pierce through body armor designed to protect the knight and his steed. Rostam tries desperately to reciprocate by shooting arrows at Esfandiyar's body, but they prove to be ineffective because the body of the Kayanian prince is invincible, for he has been blessed by the prophet Zarathustra. Desperate to save his son from humiliation and death at the hands of Esfandiyar, Rostam's father, Zal, appeals to the legendary bird Simorgh for assistance. As an infant, Zal was abandoned by his father Sam. Zal only survives after Simorgh carries him to her nest, where she raises him as one of her chicks. Zal is finally recovered by his father and brought back to Sistan, where he is appointed crown prince. Before leaving Simorgh, however, the bird gives him a handful of feathers, telling him to burn a feather when he is in desperate need of assistance and support. Zal burns one of Simorgh's feathers, and when the bird appears, he explains the crisis that he and his son confront. Simorgh immediately attends to Rostam's wounds, and she removes Esfandiyar's arrows from his body. She then uses her healing techniques to revive Rostam's horse, Rakhsh. Once she has healed their injuries, Simorgh reveals the secret of fighting and defeating Esfandiyar. The Kayanian crown prince can only be killed if Rostam cuts a branch of a tamarisk tree and converts it to an arrow by flattening it and then soaking it in wine, arming it with a sharp arrowhead, attaching feathers to its end, and finally discharging it at the eyes of Esfandiyar. The next day at dawn, Rostam, armed with his newly designed arrow, appears at the camp of Esfandiyar and calls on the warrior prince to meet him face-to-face. Remaining convinced of the necessity of reconciliation, Rostam pleads with Esfandiyar to end the hostilities. Rostam goes as far as promising the prince that he is willing to travel to the court of King Goshtasp, apologize for any past missteps, and submit himself to any punishment that he may deserve. Esfandiyar, however, repeats the same threatening and insulting statements he had uttered in their previous encounters. Recognizing that any reconciliation with Esfandiyar is an impossibility, Rostam draws his new arrow and discharges it against the prince, targeting his eyes. Struck by the arrow, Esfandiyar falls from his horse and dies shortly after. Before he dies, however, he makes Rostam promise that he will raise his son, Bahman, as his own son. Esfandiyar also blames his father, Goshtasp, for his death.

Ferdowsi's account in the *Shahnameh* contradicts the lineage of

Esfandiyar as stated in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book. The name of the mother of Esfandiyar in the *Avesta* is not Katayun but Hutaosa (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 139; *The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ashi Yasht, 46), "she of the many brothers, of the Naotara house," who begs of Vayu, the Iranian deity of wind, for a boon so that she "may be dear and loved and well-received in the house of the king Vishtaspa" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 35–36). The German scholar Friedrich Spiegel has shown the striking similarity between the story of Goshtasp in the *Shahnameh* and the story of Zariadres and Odatis. This story was featured among the Greek texts related to Persian customs and beliefs.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Esfandiyar; Lohrasp; Rostam

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Hushang

A king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, Hushang or Hoshang appears as "Haoshyangha, the Paradhata" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 21; Ram Yasht, 7; Ashi Yasht, 26; Zamyad Yasht, 26). Paradhata, which appears later as Pishdad (Before Law), became the name of the legendary dynasty. In Zamyad Yasht, "Haoshyangha, the Paradhata," is presented as the king of the seven regions of Earth, who rules "over the Daevas [Demons], the Yatus [Wizards], the Pairikas [Witches], the oppressors, the blind, and the deaf" and kills "two-thirds of the Daevas of Mazana and of the Varenya fiends" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 26). In the Pahlavi texts such as the *Bundahishn*, Hushang is identified as the son of Fravak, son of Siyamak, son of

Mashya, son of Gayomard (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.1). Hushang is therefore a direct descendant of Gayomard (Gaya Maretan of the *Avesta*), the first man. The wise lord Ahura Mazda brings Gayomard into existence in Airyanem Vaejah or Eranvej (the Expanse of the Aryans/Iranians), the homeland of the Iranian people in great antiquity. Gayomard is killed by the evil spirit after 30 years. As he is dying, the seed of Gayomard falls to Earth. That seed is "purified by the light of the sun" and after 40 years gives birth to a rhubarb plant (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 15.1). It is from the stalks of this plant that the first man and woman, Mashya and Mashyanag, come into existence. According to the Pahlavi text *Dadistan-i Dinik*, Gayomard is destroyed but comes back to the world "as a man and a woman" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part II:* Dadistan-i Dinik, 37.82, 105n5). According to the scholar Biruni, the evil spirit Ahriman "devours" Gayomard "from the head, and when he had come as far as the testicles and the spermatic vessels in the loins, two drops of sperma fell down on the earth," and "out of these drops grew two Ribas bushes [rhubarb plants] … from among which Mesha and Meshana sprang up, i.e. the Persian Adam and Eve" (Biruni: 107, 39). Mashya and Mashyanag eventually emerge as the ancestors of the human race and the parents of Siyamak, the father of Hushang, the founder of the Pishdadian dynasty. Hushang is credited with a number of important accomplishments, including the founding of the three sacred fires of ancient Iran. In *Zad Sparam*, it is written that "in the reign of Hoshang, … one night, half way, while admiring the fires, the fire-stands which were prepared in three places on the back of the ox, and in which the fire was, fell into the sea and the substance of that one great fire which was manifest, is divided into three, and they established it on the three fire-stands, and it became itself three glories whose lodgments are in the Farnbag fire [Adur Farnbag], the Gushnasp fire [Adur Gushnasp], and the Burzin-Mihr [Adur Burzin Mihr]" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Zad Sparam, 11.10).

The historians of the Islamic era identified Hushang the Pishdad as a descendant of Gayomard and as a king who ruled the seven climes of the world with wisdom, prudence, and justice for 40 years (Tabari: 1.99–100). Hushang is celebrated as the first man to civilize the world and introduce the usage of fire. Once, as Hushang is about to kill a snake, the stone he is throwing at the serpent strikes a rock and ignites fire. After discovering fire, Hushang extracts metals from rocks, melts iron, manufactures such instruments as axes and saws, and builds log houses. Hushang is also credited with the introduction of the concept of agricultural production by drawing water for irrigation of crops from rivers as well as teaching men to hunt wild animals for their meat and about domesticating animals as well. He is said to have

built houses and temples for the purpose of worshipping and venerating God. The historian Tabari credited Hushang with being the first ruler who cut trees, built homes, extracted metals from mines, introduced iron, manufactured metallic instruments, encouraged people to cultivate the land, and ordered them to kill wild animals and use their skins to make clothing and rugs and slaughter cows, buffalos, and wild beasts and eat their meat (Tabari: 1.111–112). Until then, humans lived on fruit and clad themselves in leaves. According to Tabari, the Persians also viewed Hushang as the first king to introduce a system of laws, and he was the first monarch to rule with justice and fairness (Tabari: 1.112). Hushang fights and defeats the evil spirit and his army of demons (Tabari: 1.112).

In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the poet Ferdowsi describes the first man, Gayomart, as the first king of the world, a monarch who establishes the rules and ceremonies of kingship. He lives in the mountains and wears animal skins. He teaches his people how to prepare food and clothing. He subdues wild animals and forces them to obey his authority. Gayomart has a son, Siyamak. The beautiful Siyamak is loved and adored by everyone, but he has a dangerous enemy in Ahriman, the evil spirit who is jealous of the beauty and wisdom of the young man. Ahriman and his demonic son organize an army and attack Gayomart. Siyamak leads his father's army to the battlefield. When the battle is joined Siyamak is killed, but he leaves behind a son whose name is Hushang.

The news of Siyamak's death devastates Gayomart, who mourns for a year. A year after Siyamak's death, the angel Sorush delivers a message from God that Gayomart should cease weeping and mourning and instead raise an army against the evil spirit. Gayomart has raised Siyamak's surviving son, Hushang, and loves him dearly. The grandfather and grandson gather their forces and march against the evil spirit and his supporters. When the two armies join in battle, Hushang defeats the enemy forces and kills the son of Ahriman, who has served as the commander of his father's army. Shortly after exacting his revenge, Gayomart dies after a reign of 30 years. He is succeeded by his grandson, Hushang, who ascends the throne as the founder of the Pishdadian dynasty.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Gayomard; Tahmures

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Iraj

A prince and a king in the legendary history of Greater Iran. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] Iraj appears as the youngest son of the legendary king Fereydun. Fereydun, a descendant of the great king of the Pishdadian dynasty, Jamshid, overthrows and imprisons the tyrannical king Zahhak. Fereydun rescues also the sisters of King Jamshid, Arnavaz and Shahrenaz, who were held as hostage by Zahhak, and marries them. By the age of 50, Fereydun has three sons. The mother of the first two sons is Shahrenaz, while the third has been born to Arnavaz. Searching for three wives for his three sons, Fereydun dispatches an ambassador to the court of the king of Yemen who has three daughters and requests their hands in marriage. In response, the king of Yemen proposes that Fereydun's sons visit his court so he can meet his future sons-in-law. After the sons of Fereydun visit the king of Yemen, he consents to the marriage between his daughters and the three princes. While the newly engaged are returning to the court, Fereydun decides to test the characters of his sons. Thus, he turns himself into a fire-breathing dragon and awaits their arrival along the road. When Fereydun's first son sees a roaring dragon blocking the road, he flees quickly, declaring that an intelligent and prudent man should never become engaged in a battle against such a dangerous dragon. The second son snatches an arrow, places it on his bow, and approaches the dragon, saying that he is not frightened by the sight of a terrifying monster and will fight it if he

must. Unlike his two older brothers, the third son walks fearlessly to the dragon and demands that he remove himself from the road because he is confronting the three mighty sons of King Fereydun. Having tested the character and courage of each of his three sons, Fereydun returns home.

After the three princes and their new brides arrive at his court, Fereydun confers a name on each of his sons. The oldest, who had reacted with caution and foresight to the dragon on the road, is named Salm. The second son, who displayed bravery and courage, is called Tur, and the third son, who had exhibited extraordinary audacity and courage, is named Iraj, whose name derives from the word *ēr* (noble), sharing a common etymological root with the word "Iran." After giving each a name, Fereydun divides his vast kingdom among his three sons. Salm receives the lands of the west, centered in Rum (Asia Minor), while Tur acquires the countries of the east, including Turan and China. The third son, Iraj, is appointed as the ruler of the middle kingdom, which is centered in Iran. This division ignites the jealousy of the two older brothers toward Iraj. Salm and Tur believe that despite their seniority, their father has discriminated against them by handing the best kingdom in the world to their younger brother. After some grinding of teeth and holding back their deep-seated rage and resentment, Salm writes to his brother Tur and expresses his outrage at the injustice of being the oldest son and yet receiving a faraway land as his royal inheritance. Tur, who shares his older brother's disappointment, agrees to meet with Salm. Once together, the two brothers compose a message to their father and dispatch an ambassador to deliver it to Fereydun. In their message, Salm and Tur complain about the injustice of receiving kingdoms at the two ends of the earth, while Iraj was bequeathed the best kingdom in the world. They demand that their father remove Iraj from the throne of Iran and banish him to a faraway place. After receiving the message from his sons Fereydun is outraged, but he is even more shocked by the response from his youngest son, Iraj, who suggests that he should consider stepping down from the throne as a means of appeasing his two older brothers. Iraj travels to the camp of his two brothers to negotiate a peaceful resolution to their dispute. Through a letter, Fereydun informs Salm and Tur that their youngest brother has decided to abdicate the throne, and his only expectation is that they treat Iraj with kindness and compassion. Instead of receiving Iraj with sympathy and magnanimity, however, Salm and Tur, who are outraged by the serene composure of Iraj and his popularity among their troops, decide to eliminate him despite his pleas for brotherly compromise and compassion. The murder of Iraj is incited by Salm and carried out by Tur. The brothers then send the decapitated head

of Iraj to their father, who is devastated by the heinous crime committed by his two sons. In the midst of lamentations and mourning for his ill-fated son, the grief-stricken Fereydun is informed that Mahafarid, a wife of Iraj, has given birth to a beautiful girl who resembles her father.

Fereydun raises the child as his own, and when she reaches the appropriate age he arranges for a marriage between her and his own nephew, Peshang. A son is born from this union who is named Manuchehr. Fereydun appoints Manuchehr as his successor and raises him as an educated, courageous, and honorable young man. When they hear of the rise of Manuchehr to power and prominence, Salm and Tur, who are frightened by the prospect of a confrontation with the young prince, dispatch an ambassador with gifts to express their love for him and convey their regrets and apologies for murdering Iraj. In response, Fereydun sends a threatening message to Salm and Tur informing them that they will soon meet Manuchehr on the battlefield. Not long after, the army of Iran, under the command of Manuchehr and marching behind the standard of Kaveh, the blacksmith who had revolted against the tyrant Zahhak, clashes with the combined forces of Salm and Tur. After a long campaign Manuchehr's forces prevail, and Tur is killed on the battlefield. The remainder of the enemy forces retreat, but Manuchehr proves to be a relentless fighter who is not willing to end the battle until and unless he has either captured or killed Salm. This task is accomplished in the next battle between the two armies. The victorious Manuchehr then sends a message to Fereydun informing the great king of his impressive victories. When Manuchehr returns to the court of Fereydun, he dismounts and kisses the ground to greet the great king. Fereydun takes Manuchehr's hand and places him on the throne. Shortly after the victories over Salm and Tur, Fereydun dies, and Manuchehr assumes the reins of power. But the wars between Iran, which is named after Iraj, and Turan, which is named after Tur, continue for several generations. Indeed, the long wars between the two powerful kingdoms form the central theme of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings].

The earliest reference to Iraj is made in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book. Farvardin Yasht mentions the holy Manushchitra (Manuchehr), the son of Airyu or Airya (Iraj) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 131). In the same Yasht, a reference is made to "Sairimyan countries," or the lands and countries inherited by Sairima or Salm, the oldest son of Fereydun (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 143). The Pahlavi text *Bundahishn* presents Airich or Ērich as one of the three sons of Fereydun who is murdered together with his sons by Salm and Tuj (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.9–

10). Fereydun, however, keeps the daughter of Airich/Ērich in concealment. When this daughter grows up, she gives birth to a girl. After the mother of the newly born is also killed, Fereydun hides her and her offspring for 10 generations before Manushchihar (Manuchehr) is born. Manushchihar kills Salm and Tuj in revenge for Airich (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.9–14). Another Pahlavi text, *Dina-i Mainog-i Khirad*, attributes the origin of the "estrangement" of the non-Iranians (Aniran) such as the Arumans (Romans) and the Turanians from the Iranians to "that malice which was generated by them through the slaughter of Airich/Ērich [Iraj]" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part III:* Dina-i Mainog-i Khirad, 11.25). Here, Iraj appears as the grandfather of Manushchihar (Manuchehr) who punishes Salm and Tuj (Tur) for "disturbing the world" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part III:* Dina-i Mainog-i Khirad, 27.41).

Historians of the Islamic era repeated the story of Fereydun and his three sons. Tabari wrote that Fereydun divided the Earth between his three sons. Tuj received the land of the Turks and the Khazars as well as China. Salm was bestowed with the kingship of Rum, Georgia, and the land of Slavs. The middle kingdom, which incorporated Iran, India, Sind, and Hejaz (western Arabia), became the domain of Iraj (Tabari: 1.154). When Tuj and Salm realized that their father had favored their younger brother, they joined forces and killed Iraj and his two sons (Tabari: 1.154–155).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Faranak; Jamshid; Kaveh; Zahhak

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Jamshid

Jamshid, the legendary king of Greater Iran, appears as Yima in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book. In the *Avesta*, Yima is introduced as the son of Vivanghvant, a descendant of the first man, Gaya Maretan (Gayomard) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.3). Yima is described as "brilliant, he of the many flocks, the most glorious of those yet born, the sun-like one of men" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.4). We read that "in the reign of Yima swift of motion" there was "neither cold nor heat, there was neither age nor death, nor … envy" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.5; *The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 4.16). While he ruled the seven climes of Earth, food and drink "were never failing for feeding creatures," and flocks, men, waters, and plants "were undying" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 32). He also took from the *daevas* (demons) "both riches and welfare, both fatness and flocks, both weal and Glory" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 32). Thus, as long as he ruled, "there was neither cold wind nor hot wind, neither old age nor death" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 32). But when Yima "began to find delight in words of falsehood and untruth," or, as the Persian poet Ferdowsi wrote, when Jamshid claimed to be a god, the divine glory (i.e., *khvarnah*) "was seen to flee away from him in the shape of a bird" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 34). When his glory departed the great and bright Yima "in the shape of a Varaghna bird" (probably a raven, which is one of the incarnations of the genius of victory), then Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, seized that glory (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 35). The glory was eventually seized by another hero of legendary Iran, Thraetaona (Fereydun), "the heir of the valiant Āthwya clan, who was the most victorious of all victorious men next to Zarathustra" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 36).

As the Avestan account was transformed into a historical narrative, Yima appears as Jamshid, one of the greatest of ancient Iran's legendary kings of the Pishdadian dynasty. He rules men and demons

for over 616 years and 6 months (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 14.4). It is Jamshid who teaches "the fashioning of metal; the spinning and weaving of silk and cotton; the making of linen from flax; the mining of gold and silver; the production of perfume and spices, and the erecting of houses and baths with quarried stone" (Avery: 146–147). The greatness of Jamshid in Iranian legendary history is such that the commencement of Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, and the construction of Persepolis, the magnificent palace complex of the Persian Achaemenid kings, both were attributed to him. Indeed, the name of Persepolis in Persian is Takht-e Jamshid (Throne of Jamshid).

In the end, however, the pitfall of Jamshid is that he falls in love with pride and declares himself divine (Avery: 147). With this declaration, *khvarnah* or *farr-e izadi* (divine glory) deserts him, and Jamshid falls victim to the tyrannical king Zahhak. In the *Avesta*, Zahhak appears as Azhi Dahaka, a demon. In the historical accounts, he is transformed into a great-grandson of King Siyamak, the son of the first man, Gayomard (Gayomart, Kayumars), on his father's side and a descendant of the evil spirit Ahriman on his mother's side.

In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the Persian poet Ferdowsi portrays Zahhak as the son of an Arab king. While his royal father is a generous and compassionate ruler, Zahhak is a scheming, devious, shrewd, ruthless, and brutal prince. His demonic and tyrannical character attracts the devil, who approaches Zahhak and encourages him to murder his father so that he can ascend the throne. Though Zahhak resists the temptation to kill his father and replace him on the throne, he is eventually seduced to participate in a plot hatched by the devil to eliminate his father, a generous and compassionate king. After the devil murders his father, Zahhak assumes the reins of power. The devil now reappears as a master in culinary arts, feeding Zahhak the most delicious and scrumptious dishes. Greatly impressed by his skillful and gifted chef, the king asks the devil whether he has a wish that he can fulfill. The devil responds that his only wish is to express his love for Zahhak by kissing his shoulders. Zahhak consents to this request. The devil kisses the king's shoulders, and shortly thereafter two snakes sprout on Zahhak's shoulders. Frightened by the appearance of the two serpents, Zahhak consults with physicians, but none of them can offer a healing remedy. The devil appears yet once again, this time as a healer and a physician, and prescribes a solution, which he claims will eventually result in the disappearance and death of the serpents. He proposes feeding the brains of young men to the serpents on a daily basis. This way, claims the devil, the serpents will not harm the king. Zahhak acquiesces to the devil's remedy as the best solution for his affliction and orders his henchmen to detain and kill young men and feed their brains to the serpents who have sprung

from his shoulders.

With Jamshid losing divine glory after he has declared himself to be a god, the world plunges into a long period of chaos. In a desperate attempt to find a successor for Jamshid, the court dignitaries agree to invite Zahhak to assume the reins of power. Once he has ascended the throne, Zahhak embarks on a long search for Jamshid. When Jamshid is finally captured, Zahhak orders his body to be sawed in half. Having split Jamshid into two pieces, Zahhak secures the throne, marries Jamshid's two sisters, and rules with oppression and injustice for 1,000 years. The demonic nature of the evil king continues to unfold, represented by the continuous demand of the two serpents, which have grown on his shoulders, for more human brains. Thus, Zahhak becomes known as Mardush (Serpent/Snake Shoulder). At last, the tyranny of Zahhak comes to an end after a blacksmith named Kaveh revolts against the tyrannical king. Kaveh brings Fereydun, a direct descendant of Jamshid, out of his hiding place. After overthrowing Zahhak and dragging him in chains to a cave at the summit of Mount Damavand in the Alborz mountain range of northern Iran, Fereydun ascends the throne as the legitimate king.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Fereydun; Kaveh; Zahhak; Primary Documents: Document 39

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Katayun

One of the heroines of Iran's legendary history. Katayun appears in the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] of Ferdowsi as the daughter of the king of Rum; the wife of the Kayanian prince, Goshtasp; and the mother of Esfandiyar, a hero in Iranian national history. In the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi portrays Goshtasp as the crown prince of King Lohrasp, a monarch of the Kayanian dynasty who ruled Greater Iran. Goshtasp, who is becoming increasingly alienated from his father, decides to leave Iran and travel west to the kingdom of Rum. Rum refers to Asia Minor, the core territory of the East Roman Empire. Living anonymously in Rum, Goshtasp fails to find employment and a source

of income. On the brink of impoverishment and starvation, he stumbles upon a nobleman who invites him to live at his house as a guest of honor. Meanwhile, the king of Rum is looking for a husband for his eldest daughter, Katayun. In accordance with established tradition, the king organizes a reception intended to allow his daughter to pick her husband from among the princes who would attend the banquet. The night before the banquet, Katayun dreams of a prince who will become her husband. When she attends her father's banquet, however, she does not meet the prince she had seen in her dream. Having witnessed the sadness and disappointment of his daughter, the king organizes a second gathering to which he invites a larger number of eligible bachelors, including the sons of high government officials. With the encouragement of the nobleman who is acting as his host, Goshtasp attends the second reception organized by the king of Rum. As soon as Katayun sets her eyes on the Iranian prince, she recognizes him as the man in her dream and hands him the bouquet of flowers she had prepared for her future husband. Unaware of Goshtasp's royal lineage and stunned and angered by the decision of his daughter to select a foreigner as her spouse, the king threatens to kill Katayun. The intercession of courtiers, however, convinces the king to spare his daughter's life. Instead, the enraged monarch expels Katayun from the royal palace. Banished and without a source of income, Goshtasp and Katayun are forced to live with the patron of Goshtasp, relying solely on the sale of a few pieces of jewelry, which Katayun had taken with her at the time of her banishment. The situation changes suddenly, however, when the king of Rum observes the bravery, courage, and brilliance of Goshtasp in archery and polo competitions. The king showers favors on Goshtasp, who criticizes the monarch for his callous and heartless behavior toward his daughter.

The king of Rum and Katayun remain unaware of Goshtasp's actual identity. The truth about the royal lineage of the Kayanian prince is revealed when his brother Zarir arrives in Rum. The purpose of Zarir's visit is to convince Goshtasp to return to his homeland. Goshtasp agrees to return with Katayun as his wife. Having discovered the truth about Goshtasp, the king of Rum apologizes to the Kayanian prince and showers his daughter with numerous gifts and a large dowry. Once Goshtasp arrives at the court of his father, King Lohrasp, the aging monarch places the royal crown on the head of Goshtasp and abdicates in favor of his son. From this union between Goshtasp, the crown prince of the Kayanian dynasty, and Katayun, the princess of Rum, one of Iran's most brilliant and tragic heroes, Esfandiyar, is born. It is during the reign of Goshtasp that the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) arrives at the royal court. Goshtasp welcomes the prophet and eventually converts to his religion. Following their

royal master, the court dignitaries and high officials also convert to the new religion.

The account by Ferdowsi in the *Shahnameh* contradicts the lineage of Esfandiyar as stated in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book. The name of the mother of Esfandiyar in the *Avesta* is not Katayun but Hutaosa (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 139; *The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ashi Yasht, 46), "she of the many brothers, of the Naotara house," who begs of Vayu, the Iranian deity of wind, for a boon so that she "may be dear and loved and well-received in the house of the king Vishtaspa" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 35–36). The German scholar Friedrich Spiegel has shown the striking similarity between the story of Goshtasp in the *Shahnameh* and the story of Zariadres and Odatis. This story was featured among the Greek texts related to Persian customs and beliefs.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Esfandiyar; Goshtasp; Lohrasp

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Kaveh

Kaveh, or Kaveh-ye Ahangar (Kaveh the Blacksmith), is one of the most popular and beloved heroes of Iran's legendary history. He has been described as a simple and honest blacksmith who lived during the long reign of Zahhak, the most reviled and repugnant tyrant in Iranian mythology. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, Zahhak appears as Azhi Dahaka, "the three-mouthed, the three-headed, and the six-eyed" monster who "has a thousand senses" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 34). The Zoroastrian scriptures describe him as "the most powerful, fiendish Druj [the lie], that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu [the evil spirit] created against the material world, to destroy the world of good principle" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 34). The Azhi Dahaka of the *Avesta* worships Aredvi Sura Anahita in a castle in the land of Bawri, which has been identified by some as Babylon. The principal opponent of Azhi Dahaka in the *Avesta* is Thraetaona, "the heir of the valiant Athwya clan" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 33). Thraetaona

begs the goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita to give him a boon so that he can overcome and defeat Azhi Dahaka (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 33).

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Azhi Dahaka is transformed into Zahhak, a vicious, ruthless, and cruel tyrant who personifies evil, while his opponent, the Thraetaona of the *Avesta*, appears as Fereydun, a young and courageous descendant of King Jamshid who is destined to overthrow Zahhak. Zahhak seizes power when the reigning monarch Jamshid loses his divine glory after he proclaims himself to be divine. Jamshid, who had ruled men and demons for 616 years and 6 months, is considered the greatest of all kings of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty.

The chaos that prevails after Jamshid's departure from the throne allows Zahhak to seize the reins of power. Once on the throne, Zahhak embarks on a long search for Jamshid. When Jamshid is finally captured, Zahhak orders his body to be sawed in half. Zahhak rules with oppression and injustice for 1,000 years. During his long reign, the demonic king murders young men, whose brains he then feeds to the two snakes that have appeared on his shoulders. His persistent demand to sacrifice innocent human beings to feed his hungry serpents outrages his subjects, who are too frightened to protest his heinous acts.

The sons of the blacksmith Kaveh are among those who are detained and transported to the royal palace so that their brains might be fed to the snakes on Zahhak's shoulders. Kaveh, however, refuses to allow his sons to be sacrificed without voicing any protest. The defiant blacksmith marches to the palace and protests the king's cruelty and injustice. After listening to Kaveh's protest, Zahhak orders the blacksmith's sons to be released but demands that in return for this demonstration of royal mercy and compassion Kaveh sign a proclamation that declares Zahhak to be a just ruler. This demand enrages Kaveh, who tears up the proclamation and storms out. As he leaves the palace, Kaveh places his blacksmith's leather apron on a long pole to use it as his standard. Crowds gather around Kaveh, and his protest quickly turns into a mass uprising. The defiant blacksmith and his supporters march to the Alborz Mountains seeking Fereydun, son of Abtin, a descendant of King Jamshid, who lives in the mountains in hiding, fearing for his life. Fereydun emerges from hiding and marches at the head of an army against Zahhak, who is defeated and captured. The demonic tyrant is then dragged in chains to a cave at the summit of Mount Damavand in northern Iran. With Fereydun ascending the throne, power is restored to the rightful line of kings of the Pishdadian dynasty, and peace and justice are restored.

The story of Kaveh was widely known in ancient Iran. During the

reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE), the leather standard of Kaveh, known in Persian as Derafsh-e Kavyan, emerged as the national flag of the empire and the symbol of Iranian pride and independence. Upon ascending the throne, each Sasanian king attached a precious jewel of his own to the leather apron. The standard of Kaveh accompanied the Persian kings onto every major battlefield because its presence was believed to bring triumph and victory to Iranian armies. The jewel-covered Derafsh-e Kavyan fell into the hands of Arab Muslims in the Battle of Qadisiyyah in 636 CE. The jewels were detached from the leather apron, and the apron itself was either burned or discarded.

The story of Kaveh and his revolt lived on and reappeared in the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] by Ferdowsi, who transformed the evil Azhi Dahaka of Zoroastrian tradition into Zahhak, an Arab ruler who seizes the throne of Iran and rules with oppression and injustice. For Ferdowsi, the revolution of the Iranian people that led to the overthrow of the demonic Zahhak and the restoration of legitimate rule under Fereydun was not merely an uprising against tyranny and injustice but a patriotic revolution to remove foreign rule from the ancient land of Iran.

Another writer of the Islamic era, Abu Rayhan Biruni (973–1048/1050 CE), linked the story of Kaveh to the celebration of the ancient Iranian feast of Mihragan (Mehrgan). According to Biruni, the Sasanian kings of ancient Iran celebrated the 16th day of the Iranian month of Mihr/Mehr by adorning their heads with a crown on which appeared the image of the sun and the wheel upon which the sun rotated (Biruni: 207, 40). Biruni went on to explain that he and his contemporaries believed that the day of Mihragan was especially venerated because it celebrated the joy that mankind felt upon first hearing Fereydun coming forward to rule after Kaveh had revolted against the evil Zahhak and had called upon the people to rally round Fereydun as their new king (Biruni: 207, 40–208, 1). Biruni also reminded his readers that Kaveh was the man whose gold- and jewel-encrusted leather standard, the Derafsh-e Kavyan, the Persian kings had adopted as their own (Biruni: 208, 1).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Fereydun; Zahhak

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Kay Kavus

The second king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty, Kay Kavus is the successor to the first Kayanian monarch, Kay Qobad (Kay Kavata), himself a descendant of the great king Fereydun. In Farvardin Yasht, Kay Kavus appears as the holy king Usadhan and one of the four sons of Aipivanghu. His brothers are listed as Arshan, Pisanah, and Byarshan (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 132–133). In Aban Yasht, he is mentioned as Kavi Usa, "the great" and "most wise" who offers a sacrifice of "hundred male horses, a thousand oxen," and "ten thousand lambs" to the goddess of waters, Aredvi Sura Anahita, from a mountain called Erezifya so that he may "become the sovereign lord of all countries, of the Daevas [demons] and men, of the Yatus [wizards] and Pairikas [witches], of the oppressors, the blind and the deaf" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 45–46). In Zamyad Yasht, his name is included in a list of the Kavis, or the mighty rulers of the Kayanian dynasty, "all of them brave, all of them strong, all of them healthful, all of them wise, all of them happy in their wishes, all of them powerful kings" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 71–72). In the Pahlavi text, *Bundahishn*, he is called Kai Kaus, a grandson of Kavad (Kai Kavad) and one of the four sons of Kai Apiveh. He himself is the father of "Siyavakhsh" (Siyavash) and the grandfather of "Kai Khusrob" (Kay Khosrow) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.25).

In the writings of the historians of the Islamic era, Kay Kavus appears as a ruthless and ambitious monarch who has a tendency to bungle and mismanage critical situations. The historian Tabari describes him as a king who protected his country and subjects from foreign invaders (Tabari: 2.421). Kay Kavus also sends his son, the beautiful and gifted Siyavakhsh, to the great legendary hero Rostam in Sistan in eastern Iran to educate him in various fields of knowledge, including the art of horseback riding (Tabari: 2.421). Siyavakhsh returns home a young, handsome, and highly able young man. Kay Kavus tests his son and is pleased with his vast knowledge and exceptional talents. During Siyavakhsh's absence, Kay Kavus has married a new wife, Sudabeh. According to Tabari, Sudabeh, who is a sorcerer, falls in love with Siyavakhsh and tries to seduce the Kayanian crown prince. Siyavakhsh, however, rejects Sudabeh's

advances. Humiliated and infuriated by this rejection, Sudabeh slanders Siyavakhsh in front of Kay Kavus, who changes his feelings toward his son. Having realized the change in his father's attitude toward him, Siyavakhsh begs Rostam to convince his father to appoint him as the commander of the Kayanian forces fighting Afrasiyab, the king of Turan (Tabari: 2.422). Siyavakhsh intends to be as far away from his stepmother, Sudabeh, as possible. When the armies of Siyavakhsh and Afrasiyab join in battle, the two sides opt for a peace treaty. Siyavakhsh writes to his father and informs him of the peace treaty he has signed. Kay Kavus is infuriated by news of the treaty signed between his son and the hated Afrasiyab. Kay Kavus therefore writes to Siyavakhsh and orders him to resume the campaign against the Turanian monarch. Siyavakhsh refuses to break his peace treaty with the Turanians and flees Iran for Turan, seeking refuge at the court of Afrasiyab.

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Kavi Usadhan or Kavi Usa appears as Kay Kavus, the second king of the Kayanian dynasty, an arrogant and reckless monarch who embarks on unnecessary campaigns against dangerous and powerful enemies. In one campaign he attacks the demons of Mazandaran, who inflict a humiliating defeat on Kay Kavus and his army. The Kayanian monarch is captured by Div-e Sefid, the powerful white demon, who imprisons the imprudent king and his commanders in a cave after he takes away their eyesight and puts them in chains. Addressing Kay Kavus, the white demon declares:

> Kavus, you're like a willow, fruitless and scared.
> You once thought your army could invade
> Mazandaran, …
> Since you have ascended the throne of Iran,
> Good judgment has deserted you, good reasoning has flown away.
> Here is the end of everything you sought,
> Here is the punishment for which you fought!

Kavus is only rescued from the clutches of the white demon after Rostam, the greatest hero of legendary Iran, travels to Mazandaran and fights and defeats the white demon in hand-to-hand combat. Having scored an impressive victory over the white demon, Rostam unshackles Kay Kavus, who also regains his sight after his eyes are brushed with the blood of the white demon.

Kay Kavus also plays a central role in the tragic story of his son and crown prince Siyavash. The long and bloody conflict between Iran and Turan erupts yet once again during the reign of Kay Kavus. Kay Kavus has designated Siyavash as his crown prince. The wife of Kay Kavus and the queen of Iran is Sudabeh, who falls in love with her stepson. Sudabeh attempts to seduce Siyavash, but the honorable

crown prince rejects her advances. Siyavash's rebuff enrages Sudabeh, who accuses Siyavash of raping her. Convinced of the truthfulness of his queen and outraged by the nature of her accusation, Kay Kavus orders Siyavash to undergo an ordeal that would demonstrate his guilt or innocence. This test of innocence requires the accused to ride a horse through a large bonfire. If the accused is innocent, he will emerge out of the fire unscathed. However, if he is guilty, the fire will consume him as he rides through it. Siyavash accepts the trial. He rides through the fire and survives the ordeal unharmed. Recognizing the slanderous nature of his queen's allegations, Kay Kavus orders his henchmen to execute her. Siyavash, however, intercedes and begs his father to forgive his queen and spare her life. Kay Kavus, who remains enamored with his queen, forgives her.

At this juncture, Afrasiyab at the head of a Turanian army invades Iran. Kay Kavus appoints Siyavash as the commander of the Kayanian army. The Iranians defeat the Turanian enemy. Though victorious, Siyavash negotiates a peace treaty with the Turanians, which requires Afrasiyab to send 100 hostages to the Iranian court. Afrasiyab agrees to the terms of the treaty and sends the hostages to the Kayanian court. The news that his son has concluded a peace agreement with the hated Afrasiyab enrages Kay Kavus. The king sends a message to Siyavash demanding that all the Turanian hostages be executed immediately. Kay Kavus also orders Siyavash to continue his successful military campaign against the Turanians until their king, Afrasiyab, has been captured or killed. Realizing that his father is opposed to peace and can only be satisfied by vengeance, Siyavash refuses to violate the treaty he has signed and decides to flee Iran for Turan. He travels to Turan, the historical enemy of Iran, and seeks the protection of Afrasiyab, the very foe he had only recently defeated.

At first Afrasiyab welcomes the Iranian crown prince, who is renowned for his courage, valor, and splendor, and showers him with royal honors and gifts. Afrasiyab also arranges a marriage between Siyavash and his daughter Farangis. The warm relationship between Siyavash and Afrasiyab deteriorates, however, as a result of intrigues by members of Afrasiyab's own family, particularly the Turanian king's brother Garsivaz. Garsivaz accuses Siyavash of maintaining secret contact with his father and claims that the Kayanian prince covets the Turanian throne for himself. Alarmed by his brother's allegations, Afrasiyab sends an army against Siyavash, who surrenders peacefully. Siyavash is then carted in bondage to the royal court of Turan, where he is beheaded by the order of the tyrannical and brutal Afrasiyab, whose fears and suspicions overwhelm his prudence and humanity. Afrasiyab also orders the murder of his own daughter, Farangis, but the intercession of his influential minister and adviser

Piran saves the life of the princess and her unborn son, Kay Khosrow.

Kay Khosrow is raised among shepherds, with distant supervision from the Turanian dignitary Piran, who has saved his and his mother's lives. With assistance from several Iranian heroes and dignitaries, including the greatest of Iran's legendary heroes, Rostam and Gēv, Kay Khosrow and his mother escape to Iran and are welcomed by Kay Kavus, who designates his grandson as the heir apparent and the crown prince. To avenge his father's death, Kay Khosrow raises an army and marches against Afrasiyab, his maternal grandfather. The Iranians and Turanians fight numerous battles before Kay Khosrow manages to defeat the Turanians and kill Afrasiyab. According to one Pahlavi text, the victory over Afrasiyab on the shores of Lake Chao Chast takes place on the day of Khordad in the month of Farvardin, or the sixth day of the first month of the Iranian calendar, which corresponds with the celebration of Greater Nowruz (New Year) (Kia: 8). Kay Khosrow completes his victory by destroying the Turanian temple of idols, which is located on the shores of the same lake. After his victory over Afrasiyab, Kay Khosrow returns to Iran and assumes the reins of power upon the death of Kay Kavus. Kay Kavus tries unsuccessfully to ascend to heaven on a throne carried by eagles (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 242n1). The *Avesta* identifies the victorious deity of war, Verethraghna (Bahram), as the angel who carries "the chariot of Kavi Usa; upon his wings" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 39).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Kay Khosrow; Rostam; Siyavash; Zal

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Kay Khosrow

Kay Khosrow is a legendary king of the Kayanian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, he appears as the “holy king Husravah” (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 132) or Kavi Husravah (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 74). The “gallant Husravah” is presented as “he who united the Aryan nations into one kingdom” (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 49). He offers a sacrifice of 100 male horses, 1,000 oxen, and 10,000 lambs to the goddess of waters, Aredvi Sura Anahita, behind the deep saltwater lake Chao Chast, which has been identified by some scholars as the saltwater lake Orumiyeh in the western Azerbaijan province of Iran (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 49, 66n2). He pleads with the mighty goddess to grant him the power to become “the sovereign lord of all countries, of Daevas [demons] and men, of the Yatus [wizards] and Pairikas [witches], of the oppressors, the blind and the deaf” (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 50). Husravah also begs Ashi Vanguhi, or the good Ashi, a feminine impersonation of piety, to grant him blessing so that he may defeat and kill “the Turanian murderer, Franghrasyan [Afrasiyab],” to avenge the murder of his father Siyavarshana (Siyavash) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ashi Yasht, 42). In the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn*, the father of “Kai Khusrov” is identified as “Siyavakhsh,” the son of “Kai Kaus,” and his mother is identified as “Vispanfrya” (Farangis), the daughter of the Turanian monarch “Frasiyab” (Afrasiyab) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.18, 31.25). Here Kai Khusrov is presented as a king of the Kayanian dynasty who ruled for 60 years (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 34.7).

In Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Husravah appears as Kay Khosrow, the son of the Iranian prince Siyavash and the Turanian princess Farangis. Siyavash is the son of Kay Kavus, the king of Iran, and Farangis is the daughter of the Turanian monarch Afrasiyab. The life of Kay Khosrow and his rise to power and prominence are inexorably connected to the life and the violent death of Siyavash, a tragic hero in the legendary history of Greater Iran. Although he is the crown prince of Iran, Siyavash never ascends the throne of Iran. Instead, he is forced to flee his homeland and seek the protection of

the king of Turan, Afrasiyab, the most dangerous and formidable enemy of Iran.

The ordeal of Siyavash begins after his stepmother, Sudabeh, the queen of Iran, falls in love with him. Sudabeh attempts to seduce her stepson, but the honorable Siyavash rejects her advances. Siyavash's rejection enrages Sudabeh, who accuses her stepson of raping her. Convinced of the truthfulness of his queen, Kay Kavus orders his crown prince to undergo an ordeal that would demonstrate his guilt or innocence. This test of innocence requires the accused to ride a horse through a large bonfire created by gathering an enormous amount of firewood and timber. Ancient Iranian tradition maintained that if the accused was innocent, he would emerge out of the fire unscathed. However, if he was guilty, the fire would consume him as he rode through it. Siyavash accepts the challenge, rides through the fire, and survives the ordeal unharmed. Kay Kavus, who has recognized the dishonesty of his queen, orders her execution. Siyavash, however, intercedes and begs his father to forgive Sudabeh and spare her life.

Illustration from *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the masterpiece of the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi, depicts Kay Khosrow, the legendary king of the Kayanian dynasty, marching at the head of his army to rescue the hero Godarz (Gudarz). (Heritage Image Partnership Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo)

Though Siyavash has demonstrated his innocence, his ordeal is far from being over. When Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, invades Iran, Siyavash is appointed by his father as the commander of the Iranian army. The Iranian forces fight courageously under the able leadership of their crown prince and defeat the Turanians. Though victorious, the gracious and peace-loving Siyavash negotiates a treaty with the Turanians, which requires the defeated enemy to send 100 hostages to the Iranian court. The Turanians agree to the terms of the treaty and send their hostages to Iran. The news that his son has concluded a peace agreement with Iran's most formidable enemy enrages Kay Kavus, who orders Siyavash to execute all the Turanian hostages who have been sent to his camp and continue his campaign until the king

of Turan has been captured and killed. Realizing that his father is opposed to peace, the honorable Siyavash refuses to violate the treaty he has signed with the Turanians. Instead, he travels to Turan and seeks the protection of its ruler, Afrasiyab, the leader he had only recently defeated.

At first Afrasiyab welcomes the Kayanian crown prince and showers him with royal honors and gifts. Afrasiyab also arranges a marriage between Siyavash and his daughter Farangis. The warm relationship between Siyavash and Afrasiyab deteriorates, however, as a result of intrigues by jealous courtiers and members of Afrasiyab's own family. They accuse Siyavash of coveting the throne of Turan for himself. Alarmed by these allegations, Afrasiyab sends an army against Siyavash, who surrenders without a fight. Siyavash is brought in bondage to the royal court of Turan, where he is beheaded by the order of Afrasiyab. Afrasiyab also orders the murder of his own daughter, Farangis, but the intercession of his influential adviser Piran saves the life of the princess and her unborn son, Kay Khosrow.

With assistance from several Iranian heroes and dignitaries, including Iran's legendary heroes Rostam and Gēv, Kay Khosrow and his mother escape to Iran and are welcomed by the king, Kay Kavus, who appoints his grandson as his heir apparent and crown prince. To avenge his father's death, Kay Khosrow raises an army and marches against Afrasiyab, his maternal grandfather. The Iranians and Turanians fight numerous battles before Kay Khosrow manages to defeat the Turanians and kill Afrasiyab. According to Zoroastrian texts, Afrasiyab is defeated and executed on the shores of Lake Chao Chast on the day of Khordad in the month of Farvardin, or the sixth day of the first month of the Iranian calendar, which corresponds with the celebration of Greater Nowruz (the Persian New Year) (Kia: 8). Kay Khosrow completes his victory by destroying the Turanian temple of idols, which is located on the shores of the same lake. The victorious prince returns home from his impressive victories and ascends the throne of Iran after his grandfather, Kay Kavus, dies. At the age of 60, Kay Khosrow decides to abdicate the throne. Before departing his kingdom, he appoints an obscure member of the Kayanian dynasty, Lohrasp, as his successor and the next king of Iran. He then bids farewell to his generals as well as to the tearful masses who have gathered to witness the departure of their beloved monarch. In one of the most heart-wrenching and poignant sections of the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the epic poet Ferdowsi superbly describes the departure of the Iranian king and the subsequent disappearance of several of the country's legendary heroes and warriors who accompany their monarch.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Farangis; Rostam; Siyavash

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Kay Qobad

Kay Qobad is the first king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, he appears as the holy king Kavata (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 132) and Kavi Kavata (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 71). The Zoroastrian text *Bundahishn* claims that as a child, Kavad had been abandoned in a waist cloth on a river and was discovered by King Uzava, who appears as Zab in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh.* The child was frozen and trembling on a doorsill. Uzava (Auzobo) took in the child and adopted him as his own son (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.24). Once he ascends the throne of Iran, Kay Kavad rules for 15 years (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 34.7).

In the writings of the historians of the Islamic era, Kay Kavad appears as Kay Qobad, the first king of the Kayanian dynasty. The historian Tabari wrote that when he ascended the throne, Kay Qobad declared that he would destroy the land of the Turks. He promised also to improve the living conditions of his subjects (Tabari: 2.370). Tabari wrote that Kay Qobad fought numerous battles against the Turks. He also assigned names to regions and provinces and designated certain rivers and springs for irrigation of cultivable lands. During his reign, people were encouraged to work on their land. He also took a 10th of the harvest and used this tax to cover the expenses

of his army.

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Kavad appears as Kay Qobad, the founder and the first king of the Kayanian dynasty. With the death of King Garshasp, the throne of Iran becomes vacant. Afrasiyab, the king of Turan and the most formidable enemy of Iran, uses the prevailing confusion and weakness in Iran to attack. Anxious to raise an army against the Turanians, the Iranian leaders appeal to the great hero Zal to lead the resistance against the foreign invaders. The aging Zal appoints his son Rostam as the commander of Iranian forces. But both Zal and Rostam are painfully aware that aside from a strong army and a capable general, the country also needs a new leader who possesses the divine glory and the sufficient qualifications to rule. They therefore select a descendant of the great king, Fereydun, who lives in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran, as the new king. This young and capable man is Kay Qobad, who ascends the throne of Iran as the first monarch of the new Kayanian dynasty.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Kay Kavus; Rostam; Zal

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Lohrasp

Lohrasp, also spelled as Luhrasp, is a king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, he appears as Aurvath-aspa, the father of the valiant Kavi Vishtaspa (Goshtasp) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 105). In the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn*, his lineage is given as Lohrasp, "son of Auzav, son of Manush, son of Kai Pisin, son of Kai Apiveh, son of Kai Kavad" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.28), who ruled for "a hundred and twenty years" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 34.7). In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*,

Lohrasp is presented as the unexpected and unanticipated successor to the Kayanian monarch, Kay Khosrow. At the age of 60, Kay Khosrow shocks his dignitaries by announcing that he has decided to abdicate the throne. Before departing his kingdom, he handpicks Lohrasp, a knight of modest repute, as his successor and the next king of Iran. The choice is initially opposed by the grandees and army commanders at the court. In fact, a row erupts between the departing king and his generals over the qualifications of Lohrasp as a future king. The dispute is quickly settled, however, and Lohrasp ascends the throne. His long reign of 120 years proves to be uneventful. The new king's only real trouble arises from his power-hungry son Goshtasp, who pressures his father to abdicate the Kayanian throne in his favor. When Lohrasp dismisses his son's demand, Goshtasp leaves Iran in protest and travels west, where he marries Princess Katayun, the daughter of the king of Rum. Lohrasp sends one of his sons to convince Goshtasp to return home. The ambitious son returns home. Upon Goshtasp's arrival, Lohrasp abdicates the throne and allows his son to assume the reins of power. For the remainder of his life, Lohrasp pursues a life of seclusion and meditation. In the writings of the historians of the Islamic era, Lohrasp appears as Lohrasf, the king of the Kayanian dynasty (Tabari: 2.432). He is credited with the construction of the city of Balkh in present-day Afghanistan (Tabari: 2.453). He rules for 120 years and is succeeded by his son Goshtasp. Several Muslim historians wrote that Lohrasp was killed by the Turanians when they invaded Balkh, the capital of the Kayanian kingdom (Ibn al-Balkhi: 51).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Goshtasp; Katayun; Kay Khosrow

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Manuchehr

Manuchehr (Manochihr) is a king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty. He appears as "the holy Manushchitra, the son of Airyu [Ēraj/Iraj]" in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 131). Thus, he traces his lineage to the great warrior King Thraetaona (Ferēdūn, Fereydun) and Thraetaona's youngest son, Airyu (Ēraj/Iraj). According to the Pahlavi text the *Bundahishn*, the king, Fereydun (Ferēdūn), had three sons: Salm, Tuj (Tur), and Ēraj. Ēraj had two sons and one daughter. The brothers of Ēraj, Salm and Tur, killed him and his two sons, but Fereydun saved the daughter of Ēraj by hiding her. When this daughter of Ēraj grew up, she gave birth to a girl who was also kept by Fereydun in concealment. Salm and Tur killed the daughter of Ēraj, but eventually after several generations a boy was born who was named Manushchihr (Manuchehr) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.9–14). He was born on a mountain called Manusha, the second mountain that rose up out of the earth (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 1; *Bundahishn:* 12.10). In avenging the death of Ēraj, Manushchihr slays Salm and Tur (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.12). Manushchihr ascends the throne after the death of Fereydun and rules for 120 years (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 34.6). *Bundahishn* also credits Manushchihr with discovering the sources of the Euphrates River, which rises in Armenia, traverses Syria, and joins the Tigris. We are also told that he built canals for irrigation along the course of the Euphrates (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 20.10–12, 78n3).

In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] of Ferdowsi, Manuchehr appears as a descendant of the great king of the Pishdadian dynasty, Fereydun, and the latter's third son, Iraj. After defeating the demonic tyrant Zahhak, Fereydun ascends the throne. By the age of 50, Fereydun has three sons. The oldest is Salm, the second son is Tur, and the third son is Iraj. Fereydun then divides his vast kingdom among his three sons. Salm receives the lands of the west, namely Asia Minor and the land of Slavs; Tur is allotted the eastern provinces, the land of the Turks and China; and Iraj receives the middle kingdom, which is centered in Iran. This division ignites the jealousy of the two older brothers, who murder Iraj. They then send the decapitated head of their brother to King Fereydun. In the midst of lamentations and mourning for his ill-

fated son, Fereydun is informed that Mahafarid, a wife of Iraj, has given birth to a beautiful girl who resembles her father. Fereydun raises the child as his own, and when she reaches the appropriate age, he arranges for a marriage between her and one of his nephews. A son is born from this union who is named Manuchehr. Fereydun appoints Manuchehr as his successor and raises him as an honorable, educated, and courageous young man. The army of Iran, led by Manuchehr, marches against the combined forces of Salm and Tur. After several days of bloody warfare, Manuchehr prevails. Tur is killed on the battlefield. The remainder of the enemy forces under the command of Salm retreat to a fortress. After several battles, Salm is defeated and slain. The victorious Manuchehr then sends a message to Fereydun informing the great king of his victories. When Manuchehr returns to the court, he dismounts and kisses the ground to greet the great king. Fereydun takes Manuchehr's hand and places him on the throne. Shortly after the defeat of Salm and Tur, Fereydun dies, and Manuchehr ascends the throne as the king. But the wars between Iran and Turan (the land named after Tur), which forms one of the central themes of the *Shahnameh*, are only beginning, igniting a feud between the kings of Iran and Turan that would last for generations.

During his long reign, Manuchehr fights the Turanian king Afrasiyab, who proves to be a shrewd, calculating, and highly intelligent adversary. On one occasion, Afrasiyab corners Manuchehr and forces him to sue for peace. When Manuchehr agrees to make peace with Afrasiyab, it is stipulated that the best of Iran's archers "should ascend Mount Damavand and from thence discharge an arrow towards the east; and that the place in which the arrow" falls "should form the boundary" between the two kingdoms of Iran and Turan (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 95n2). The archer Arash volunteers to climb the mountain and discharge his arrow. The arrow of the great archer travels from dawn until noon and it falls on the banks of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 95n2), which is then established as the boundary between Iran and Turan. The Pahlavi text *Mah-e Farvardin Ruz-e Khordad* [The Month of Farvardin the Day of Khordad] states that on the sixth day of Farvardin, the first month of the Iranian calendar, King Manuchehr, together with Arash Shivatir of the swift arrow, reclaimed the Iranian lands from Afrasiyab, the Turanian who had invaded Iran. The scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni linked the story of Arash to the feast of Tiragan (Tirgan), which was celebrated on the day of Tir (i.e., the 13th day of each month) in the month of Tir, the fourth month in the Iranian calendar. Biruni wrote:

> on the 13th, or Tir-Roz, there is a feast Tiragan, so called on account of the identity of the name of the month and the day. Of

> the two causes to which it is traced, one is this, that Afrasiyab after having subdued Eranshahr (Iran), and while besieging Minocihr [Manuchehr] in Tabaristan [the Caspian province of Mazandaran] asked him some favor. Minocihr complied with his wish, on the condition that he (Afrasiyab) should restore to him a part of Eranshahr as long and as broad as an arrow-shot. On that occasion there was a genius present, called Isfandarmadh; he ordered to be brought a bow and an arrow of such a size as he himself had indicated to the arrow-maker, in conformity with that which is manifest in the *Avesta*. Then he sent for Arish, a noble, pious, and wise man, and ordered him to take the bow and to shoot the arrow. Arish stepped forward, took off his clothes, and said: "O king, and ye others, look at my body. I am free from any wound or disease. I know that when I shoot with this bow and arrow I shall fall to pieces and my life will be gone, but I have determined to sacrifice it for you." Then he applied himself to the work and bent the bow with all the power God had given him; then he shot, and fell asunder into pieces. By the order of God the wind bore the arrow away from the mountain of Ruyan and brought it to the utmost frontier of Khurasan between Farghana and Tabaristan; there it hit the trunk of a nut-tree that was so large that there had never been a tree like it in the world. The distance between the place where the arrow was shot and that where it fell was 1,000 Farsakh. Afrasiyab and Minocihr made a treaty on the basis of this shot that was shot on this day. In consequence people made it a feast-day. (Biruni: 205, 25)

In a section of his *History*, devoted to the festivals of Zoroastrians, the historian Gardizi wrote that on the 13th day of the month of Tir, the Zoroastrians celebrated a festival called Tirgan (Gardizi: 518–519), for it was on this day that the king of Iran, Manuchehr, made peace with Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, after they agreed that the arrow of an archer should set the boundary between the two kingdoms. The archer Arash discharged an arrow that traveled from the mountains of Ruyan (northern Iran) and landed on a mountain between Farghaneh (present-day Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) and Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan) (Gardizi: 518). Gardizi added that on this day the Zoroastrians bathed and cleansed themselves. They also cooked a dish that contained wheat mixed with fruits (Gardizi: 518–519).

See also: *Ancient Provinces:* Alborz; *Legendary Kings:* Arash; Afrasiyab; Fereydun; Zahhak

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Pishdadian

Pishdadian is the name of the first dynasty in the legendary history of Greater Iran. Iranian tradition names the kings of the Pishdadian dynasty as Hushang (Hoshang), Tahmures (Tahmurath), Jamshid (Jamshēd), Zahhak (Dahāk), Fereydun (Ferēdun), Iraj (Ēraj), Manuchehr (Manochihr), Nowzar, Zab (Zav), and Garshasp (Garshasb).

The legendary Pishdadian dynasty traces its origins to Gayomard (Gaya Maretan of the *Avesta*, Gayomard of Pahlavi texts, and Gayomart of the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]), who in Zoroastrian tradition is designated as the first man created by the wise lord Ahura Mazda in Airyanem Vaejah (Expanse of the Aryans), the mythological homeland of the Iranian people. In his *Shahnameh*, the poet Ferdowsi described Gayomart as the first king of the world, a monarch who established the rules and ceremonies of kingship. He lives in the mountains and wears animal skins. He teaches his people how to prepare food and clothing. He subdues wild animals and forces them to obey his authority. He has a son, Siyamak, whom he loves with his whole heart. The handsome Siyamak is loved by everyone, but he has a dangerous enemy in Ahriman, the evil spirit who is jealous of the beauty and wisdom of the young prince. Ahriman and his son organize an army and attack Gayomart. Siyamak leads his father's army to the battlefield. When the battle is joined, Siyamak is killed. The news of his death devastates Gayomart, who mourns for an entire year.

A year after Siyamak's death, the angel Sorush delivers a message from God that Gayomart should cease mourning and instead raise an army against the evil spirit. Gayomart has raised Siyamak's surviving son, Hushang (Haoshyangha of the *Avesta*), and loves him dearly. The grandfather and grandson gather their forces and march against the evil spirit and his supporters. When the two armies clash, Hushang defeats the enemy and kills the son of Ahriman, who has served as the commander of his father's army. Shortly after exacting his revenge, Gayomart dies after a reign of 30 years. He is succeeded by his grandson Hushang, who ascends the throne as the founder of the Pishdadian dynasty.

In the *Avesta*, Hushang appears as "Haoshyangha, the Paradhata [Pishdad]" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 21; Ram Yasht, 7; Ashi Yasht, 26; Zamyad Yasht, 26). Here he offers a sacrifice to the deity Vayu so he can receive blessing and support in his attempt to kill "two-thirds of the Daevas [demons]" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 7). In Zamyad Yasht, "Haoshyangha, the Paradhata," was presented as the king of the seven regions of Earth who "ruled over the Daevas [demons], the Yatus [wizards], the Pairikas [witches], the oppressors, the blind, and the deaf; he who smote two-thirds of the Daevas of Mazana and of the Varenya fiends" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 5.26).

In the Pahlavi texts such as the *Dinkard*, Hushang is credited with "the establishment of law and custom … that of village superintendence, … for the cultivation and nourishment of the world, based upon the traditional early law … ; and … of monarchy, for the protection and government of the creatures" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part V:* Dinkard, 8.13.5). Hushang is also recognized as the king who discovers fire. Once as he is about to kill a snake, the stone he is throwing at the serpent strikes a rock and ignites fire. After discovering fire, Hushang extracts metals from rocks, melts iron, manufactures such instruments as axes and saws, and builds log houses. Tradition has it that Hushang also introduced the concept of agricultural production by drawing water for irrigation of crops from rivers, teaching men to hunt wild animals for their meat, and domesticating animals as well. He is said to have built houses and temples for the purpose of worshipping and venerating god. After 40 years (according to *Bundahishn*) or 30 years (according to Ferdowsi) of ruling the world, Hushang dies. He is succeeded by his great-grandson, Tahmures (Tahmurath).

In the Zoroastrian holy book, *Avesta*, Tahmures appears as "the well-armed Takhma Urupa" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 11; Zamyad Yasht, 28). In Pahlavi texts, he appears as the second ruler of the seven regions of the world (*Pahlavi Texts, Part V: Marvels of*

Zoroastrianism: Dinkard, 8.13.6). In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, upon ascending the throne Tahmures declares that he intends to rid the world from evil. In pursuing this goal, Tahmures raises an army, attacks the demons, kills two-thirds of them, and captures and imprisons the remaining one-third. His victory over the demons earns him the title "Divband" (Demon Binder). Humbled by Tahmures, the demons attempt to reach a compromise with him: they promise that if he keeps them alive, they would be willing to teach him some of their secrets. Tahmures agrees, and the demons teach him how to write in 30 languages. Tahmures also introduces the technique of breeding new animals and teaches people the art of spinning and weaving wool. He trains falcons and cheetahs to assist humans in hunting wild animals. After ruling for 30 years, Tahmures dies and is succeeded by Jamshid.

Jamshid rules men and demons for over 600 years. He is presented as the greatest of all kings of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty. It is Jamshid who is credited with teaching "the fashioning of metal; the spinning and weaving of silk and cotton; the making of linen from flax; the mining of gold and silver; the production of perfume and spices, and the erecting of houses and baths with quarried stone" (Avery: 146–147). Jamshid also appears as the most colorful of all the kings of Iran's legendary history. Historians of the Islamic era credited him with the creation of the social estates. The first consisted of men of religion, the second were the men of the army, and the third was made up of the commoners, namely the merchants, artisans, and peasant farmers. The greatness of Jamshid in Iranian mythology reached such a point that the commencement of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, and the construction of Persepolis, the magnificent palace complex of the Persian Achaemenid kings built by Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) and his successors, were both attributed to him. Hence, the name of Persepolis in Persian, even today, is Takht-e Jamshid (Throne of Jamshid). Jamshid's folly, however, is that he falls in love with pride and, persuaded by the evil spirit Ahriman, declares himself divine (Avery: 147). Once he declares himself divine, Jamshid loses divine glory (*khvarnah* or *farr*) and falls victim to the demonic Zahhak, a descendant of Siyamak on his father's side and of Ahriman, or the evil spirit, on his mother's side.

In the *Avesta*, Zahhak (Dahak) appears as Azhi Dahaka (Dragon), a "three-headed, the three-mouthed and the six-eyed" monster who "has a thousand senses," the most powerful, "fiendish Druj [the lie], that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu [the evil spirit] created against the material world, to destroy the world of good principle" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 61–62). The Azhi Dahaka of the *Avesta* worships Aredvi Sura Anahita in a

castle in the land of Bawri, which has been identified by some scholars as Babylon. In Iran's legendary history, Zahhak appears as a brutal and bloodthirsty tyrant. Upon seizing the throne, Zahhak organizes a search to locate Jamshid. Once Jamshid is captured, Zahhak orders his body to be sawed in half. Having murdered Jamshid, the tyrant rules with oppression and injustice for 1,000 years.

In the *Shahnameh*, the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi portrays Zahhak as the son of an Arab king. In sharp contrast to his father, who is a just, generous, and compassionate ruler, Zahhak is a scheming, ruthless, and brutal prince. His demonic and tyrannical character attracts the devil, who approaches Zahhak and encourages him to murder his father. Initially Zahhak resists the temptation to kill his father, but he is eventually seduced to participate in a plot hatched by the devil to eliminate the king. After the devil murders his father, Zahhak assumes the reins of power. The devil now reappears as a master in culinary arts and feeds Zahhak the most sumptuous dishes. Greatly impressed by his skillful and gifted chef, Zahhak asks the devil whether he has a wish that the king can fulfill. The devil responds that his only wish is to be allowed to express his love for Zahhak by kissing the king's shoulders. Zahhak consents to this request. The devil kisses the king's shoulders, and shortly thereafter two serpents sprout on Zahhak's shoulders. Thus, in Iranian mythology Zahhak is called Mardush (Serpent/Snake Shoulder). Frightened by the appearance of the two serpents, Zahhak consults with physicians, but none can offer him a remedy. The devil appears yet once again, this time as a healer and a physician who prescribes a solution that he claims will calm the serpents. The remedy he suggests is to feed the serpents the brains of young men daily. Zahhak agrees to the devil's remedy and orders his guards to detain and kill young men and feed their brains to the serpents on his shoulders. To calm the hunger of the two snakes, Zahhak continues to feed them the brains of young men. Though outraged by his tyranny and savagery, Zahhak's frightened and intimidated subjects do not protest his heinous acts for fear of violence and retribution from the evil king.

Rebellion against Zahhak finally erupts when the sons of a blacksmith, named Kaveh, are seized and transported to the palace so that their brains can be served to the serpents on the king's shoulders. Kaveh is not willing to allow the murder of his sons to be carried out by the king's henchmen without a public airing of his pain and outrage. He marches to the royal palace to protest this intolerable oppression and injustice of Zahhak. Zahhak responds to Kaveh's objections by releasing the blacksmith's sons. In return for showing such compassion and mercy, Zahhak demands that Kaveh sign a proclamation that describes Zahhak as a just and upright ruler. This

demand outrages Kaveh, who tears the proclamation into pieces and storms out of the palace. As he leaves the palace, Kaveh places his blacksmith's leather apron on a long pole to use as his standard. Crowds gather around Kaveh, and his protest quickly turns into a mass uprising. The rebellious blacksmith and his supporters march to the Alborz Mountains seeking Fereydun, the son of Abtin (Aptin), a descendant of King Jamshid, who lives in the mountains in hiding, fearing for his life. Fereydun is brought forth from his hiding place and hailed as the legitimate king. He then marches at the head of an army, defeats Zahhak, and captures the tyrant at his palace. The demonic king is then dragged in chains to a cave on the summit of Mount Damavand in northern Iran. With Fereydun ascending the throne, power is restored to the rightful line of kings, and peace and justice are restored.

Fereydun rules in peace and justice for 50 years. By the age of 50, Fereydun has three sons. The mother of the first two sons is King Jamshid's sister Shahrenaz, while the third has been born to Jamshid's sister Arnavaz. The oldest son is Salm. The second son is Tur. The third son, the favorite of his father, is Iraj (Ēraj). King Fereydun divides his kingdom among his three sons. Salm receives the lands of the west, Tur is allotted the lands of east, and Iraj receives the middle kingdom, which is centered in Iran. This division ignites the jealousy and hatred of Salm and Tur, who murder their brother, Iraj.

As he is mourning for his ill-fated son, Fereydun receives a message that Mahafarid, a wife of Iraj, has given birth to a beautiful girl, who resembles her father. Fereydun raises the child as his own and, when she reaches the appropriate age, arranges for a marriage between her and one of his relatives. This union produces a son, who is named Manuchehr (Manōchihr). Fereydun appoints Manuchehr as his successor and raises him to be an educated, honorable, and well-trained young man. Marching behind the standard of Kaveh, the blacksmith who had revolted against the tyrant Zahhak, the army of Iran clashes with the combined forces of Salm and Tur. After several days of bloody warfare, Manuchehr's forces prevail. Tur is killed on the battlefield. The remainder of the enemy forces retreat to a fortress, but Manuchehr proves to be relentless. He is not willing to end the conflict until he has either captured or killed Salm. This task is accomplished in the next battle between the two armies. Shortly after the victories over Salm and Tur, Fereydun dies, and Manuchehr ascends the throne as the new king. The wars between Iran and Turan (the land named after Tur) continue, however, and form one of the central themes of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh.*

During the reign of Manuchehr, the legendary king Afrasiyab ascends the throne of Turan. He invades and occupies Iran, trapping

Manuchehr and his army in the mountains of Tabarestan. Afrasiyab, who is on the verge of defeating the Iranians, proposes to end the war and conclude a peace treaty. The Iranians and Turanians agree to cease all hostilities and establish a new boundary by an archer who will shoot his arrow in an easterly direction from the top of a mountain. Wherever the arrow lands would be recognized as the new boundary between the two kingdoms of Iran and Turan. Afrasiyab's expectation is that he will seize much of the territory of Iran, since no archer can shoot his arrow beyond a short distance. The brilliant archer Arash volunteers to discharge his arrow as far east as he can. Arash climbs Mount Damavand, the highest peak in the Alborz mountain range, and discharges his arrow. Arash's arrow travels long and far before it lands at the end of the day on the banks of the Oxus River (Amu Darya), which is established as the new boundary between Iran and Turan. Upon the death of Manuchehr, his son Nowzar ascends the throne. Weak, self-indulgent, greedy, gluttonous, and incompetent, Nowzar alienates his generals and officials as well as the ordinary people from the throne. Despite repeated warnings from his dignitaries, the king fails to address the growing chaos in his kingdom. With Iran's army and government in shambles, the shrewd and opportunistic king of Turan, Afrasiyab, marches against Nowzar. Despite their heroism on the battlefield, the Iranians are defeated, and their king is captured. The humiliated Iranian king is brought to Afrasiyab. After reminding his prisoner of the vendetta between the kings of Iran and Turan, Afrasiyab decapitates Nowzar with his sword. Though Nowzar has two sons, the Iranian dignitaries refuse to allow them to ascend the throne, as they are believed to lack the sufficient training and qualities to rule. With the royal line of Nowzar coming to a sudden end, the court grandees select an old member of the Iranian nobility, Zab (Zav), as the new ruler. When Zab dies, his son Garshasp ascends the throne. Both Zab and Garshasp, however, fail to restore the glory and power of the Iranian state. With the death of Garshasp, the throne of Iran is vacant. Once again, the Turanians under the command of Afrasiyab use the weakness of the Iranian state to attack. At this juncture, the Iranian leaders appeal to the great hero Zal to lead the resistance against the foreign invaders. The aging Zal appoints his son Rostam as the commander of Iran's army. But both Zal and Rostam are painfully aware that the kingdom needs a new and able ruler who possesses the divine glory. They therefore select a descendant of the great king, Fereydun, who lives in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran. This young and capable man is Kay Qobad, who ascends the throne of Iran as the founder of a new dynasty, namely the Kayanids or Kayanians. Kay Qobad appears as Kay Kavata (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 132; Zamyad

Yasht, 71).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Arash; Fereydun; Gayomard; Jamshid; Kaveh; Zahhak

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Rostam

The mightiest and most accomplished of all heroes of Iran's legendary history. Rostam's action-packed life, numerous illustrious accomplishments, and at times tragic encounters are celebrated and immortalized by the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi in his masterpiece, the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings]. Many of Rostam's extraordinary feats and exploits on and off the battlefield are performed in defense of the Kayanian kings of Greater Iran. But the story of Rostam is not confined to these adventures. It also is filled with tragic recklessness and devastating foolhardiness. In one instance Rostam kills his own son, Sohrab, a mighty warrior in his own right, without recognizing him until afterward. In another instance, Rostam defeats and kills the great hero Esfandiyar, the crown prince of King Goshtasp, the first monarch to accept the teachings of the Iranian prophet, Zarathustra.

Rostam is the son of the legendary hero Zal and the grandson of

another great hero, Sam, who rules for a time as the king of Sistan, the region corresponding to eastern Iran and southwestern Afghanistan. Rostam's mother is Rudabeh, the daughter of the king of Kabul. Because of his enormous size as a baby in his mother's womb, Rostam is born through Caesarean section, which is performed by the magical bird Simorgh. Simorgh saves Rudabeh and her child because of her special relationship with Rostam's father, Zal. Simorgh had adopted Rostam's father, Zal, who as a child had been abandoned by his father because he was born an albino. Simorgh would reappear in Rostam's life again to assist him in his battle against Esfandiyar, the crown prince of King Goshtasp.

As a young man Rostam has a love affair with a woman named Tahmineh but is unaware that she has become pregnant as a result. Their love affair results in the birth of a son, who is named Sohrab. Sohrab grows up to become a handsome and strongly built young man as well as a mighty warrior. Later in life the father and the son would fight on the battlefield, with Sohrab defeating Rostam in their first encounter and Rostam winning the second confrontation, in which Sohrab is killed at the hands of his own father, who does not discover the true identity of the mighty knight he has killed until after Sohrab's death.

In one tale of the *Shahnameh*, Rostam travels to Turan to rescue another Iranian hero, Bijhan, who has been imprisoned by King Afrasiyab. Accompanied by his friend Gorgin, Bijhan enters the territory of Iran's enemy, Turan. Encouraged by his friend, Bijhan manages to meet the beautiful Manijheh, a daughter of the Turanian king Afrasiyab. Bijhan and Manijheh fall in love, and the Turanian princess convinces the Iranian knight to meet her in her chamber, where the two lovers are found by Manijheh's father, Afrasiyab. Infuriated by the brazen nature of Bijhan's behavior, Afrasiyab orders the Iranian warrior to be imprisoned in a deep well, which is covered by a large and heavy rock. Manijheh manages to sneak some food and water through a crack in the rock. Meanwhile, Gorgin manages to return to Iran. Though embarrassed by the entire episode, Gorgin is forced to reveal the story of Bijhan and his capture. The only individual capable of rescuing Bijhan is Rostam, who agrees to travel to Turan. Rostam frees Bijhan from the well in which he has been imprisoned, and after he and Manijheh are reunited, Rostam brings them back with him to Iran.

In another story, Rostam confronts Esfandiyar, the crown prince of the Kayanian monarch Goshtasp. The challenge confronting Rostam is that Esfandiyar has an impenetrable body. The only means to defeat and kill Esfandiyar is by targeting his eyes. Once again, the magical bird Simorgh intervenes. Simorgh heals the wounds that Rostam and

his horse Rakhsh have suffered in their first encounter with Esfandiyar. Then the wise bird reveals the secret of fighting and defeating Esfandiyar. The Kayanian crown prince can only be killed if Rostam strikes his eyes with an arrow, which Rostam does with great success, killing Esfandiyar on the battlefield. Rostam is also renowned for undergoing seven trials, known as the Haft Khan, fighting demons and defeating them in each battle. Rostam's illustrious career comes to a sudden end when he and his brother, Zavareh, fall victim to a plot hatched by the king of Kabul. Faramarz, the son of Rostam, retrieves the body of his father and then avenges his death by attacking Kabul, killing its king, and destroying the city.

Illustration from *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], by the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi, depicts the legendary Kayanian prince Esfandiyar battling Iran's most distinguished legendary hero, Rostam. Despite initial setbacks on the battlefield, Rostam manages to kill Esfandiyar by shooting an arrow made of the branches of the tamarisk tree at the eyes of the prince. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Kay Khosrow; Siyavash; Zahhak; Zal; *Prophets:* Ferdowsi

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Simorgh

The Persian name of a majestic, wise, and powerful mythical bird that plays an important role in Iran's legendary history. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, Simorgh appears as "*meregho saeno*" or "the bird Saena" and as "the great bird, the Saena" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 41). Saena is associated with "the tree of the eagle," also called "the tree of good remedies, the tree of powerful remedies, the tree of all remedies, … on which rest the seeds of all plants" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Rashn Yasht, 17). The "tree of eagle" stands in the middle of the sea called Vouru-Kasha (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Rashn Yasht, 17). In Bahram Yasht, the victorious war deity Verethraghna is likened to the great bird Saena as he bestows fortune on the house of the faithful "with its wealth in cattle" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 41). Verethraghna is like "the great bird Saena," who resembles "the big clouds, full of water that beat the mountains" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 41). In the Pahlavi texts, the nest of Seno-Muruv, the Avestan Saeno Meregho, which is described as the griffin bird, is on "the many-seeded tree" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part III:* Dina-i Mainog-i Khirad, 62.37). Whenever the griffin bird "rises aloft, a thousand twigs will shoot out from that tree, and when he alights, he breaks off the thousand twigs and bites, the seed from them" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part III:* Dina-i Mainog-i Khirad, 62.38–40). In another Zoroastrian religious text, namely the *Bundahishn*, Simorgh appears as an actual bird among the 110 species of birds, which also include eagles, vultures, crows, cranes, and even bats (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 14.23). Here again, Simorgh is associated with "the tree of many seeds" that "has grown amid the wide-formed ocean, and in its seed are all plants," believed to be by some as "the proper-curing" and by others as "energetic curing" and yet by a third group as "all curing" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 18.9).

In the legendary history of Iran, the bird Simorgh is associated with the great hero Zal or Dastan. Zal is one of the great mythological heroes of Greater Iran. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Zal appears as the father of Rostam, the greatest legendary warrior of ancient Iran. Zal himself is the son of Sam and the grandson of Nariman, both legendary heroes in Iranian mythology. Because Dastan is born with snowy white hair, he is called Zal, which is the word for "albino" in Persian. His father, Sam, who blames the evil spirit, or Ahriman, for the "curious" and "unusual" appearance of his son, curses his fate and

decides to abandon the infant Zal in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran. The child cries out in his loneliness, hunger, and desperation until he is observed by the wise and powerful bird Simorgh, who is hunting for food to feed her young. Simorgh carries the infant to her nest. Having rescued the child, Simorgh adopts Zal as her own son, nursing, feeding, and raising him in her nest. The young boy grows up to become a strong and handsome man. Meanwhile, Zal's father, Sam, a vassal of the king of Iran, Manuchehr, becomes the ruler of Sistan in eastern Iran. One night Sam has a dream that jolts him to the realization that he should search for his abandoned son. The aging king regrets his decision to abandon his son and embarks on a journey to recover him. In his search for his lost son, Sam travels to the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran. After pleading with god to return his son safely to him, Sam finally discovers Zal. At first the young man refuses to abandon his adopted mother, Simorgh, and return to his father, but after the bird promises him a brilliant future and hands him samples of her feathers, Zal agrees to descend from the mountain and join his father. Simorgh assures Zal that in times of need, despair, and peril he should throw one of the feathers, which contains god's glory, into a fire, and the bird will appear at once to guide and assist him. These individual feathers from Simorgh would play an important role in the life of Zal and his family, particularly in the birth and heroic feats of his son, Rostam.

Illustration from *Kitab ajayib al-makhluqat va gharaib al-mowjudat* [The Book of the Marvels of Creatures and the Strange Things Existing], a 13th-century Persian scientific book written by Zakariya Qazvini, depicts the mythical bird Simorgh. (Universal History Archive/UIG via Getty Images)

Because of his enormous size as a baby in his mother's womb, Rostam can cause the death of his own mother, Rudabeh. In his desperation to save the life of his wife and unborn child, Zal puts one of the feathers, which Simorgh had given him, into a fire. Simorgh appears instantly. Zal explains the situation to the bird, who suggests a Caesarean section. Thus, Simorgh saves Rudabeh and her child, who is named Rostam. Simorgh reappears in Rostam's life again to assist him in his battle against Esfandiyar, the crown prince of the Kayanian monarch Goshtasp.

When Rostam goes to battle with Esfandiyar, he immediately realizes that despite his experience in fighting and defeating numerous demons, dragons, and warriors, he is no match for the brilliant prince.

During the first day of battle, Rostam and his legendary horse Rakhsh are gravely wounded by Esfandiyar's sharp arrowheads, which pierce body armors designed to protect the knight and his steed. Rostam tries desperately to reciprocate by shooting arrows at Esfandiyar's body, but they prove to be ineffective because the body of the Iranian prince is invincible, as he has been blessed by the prophet Zarathustra.

Desperate to save his son from humiliation and death at the hands of Esfandiyar, Rostam's father, Zal, appeals to Simorgh for assistance. Upon burning one of Simorgh's feathers, the magnificent bird appears once again. Zal explains the deadly situation that he, his son, and their entire family confront. Simorgh immediately attends to Rostam's wounds after removing Esfandiyar's arrows from his body. The wise bird then uses her healing feathers to revive Rostam's horse, Rakhsh. Once Simorgh has healed their injuries, the wise bird reveals the secret of fighting and defeating Esfandiyar. The Kayanian crown prince can only be killed if Rostam discharges an arrow against his eyes. Rostam follows Simorgh's instructions, striking Esfandiyar in his eyes and killing the Kayanian prince on the battlefield.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Esfandiyar; Zal

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Siyavash

Siyavash (Siavash), meaning "the possessor of black horses/stallions," is a prince and a hero in the legendary history of Greater Iran during the reign of the Kayanian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, he appears as Siyavarshana (Siyavakhsh), the son of Kavi Usa (Kay Kavus) and the father of Husrava (Khosrow) or Kavi Husrava (Kay Khosrow). He is killed by "the Turanian murderer, Frangrasyan

[Afrasiyab],” and is avenged by his son Kavi Husrava, who captures and kills Frangrasyan and his brother Keresavazda (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Gosh Yasht, 18; Zamyad Yasht, 77). In Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], Siyavakhsh appears as Siyavash, the son and designated successor of the Iranian king Kay Kavus, the second monarch of the Kayanian dynasty. Siyavash is described as a tall, handsome, brave, and highly educated young man. He is raised and educated in the art of war by Rostam, the legendary hero of Greater Iran.

After years of being trained by Rostam, Siyavash returns to his father’s court, where he is declared the crown prince. The relationship between the king and his crown prince deteriorates, however, after Sudabeh, the queen of Iran, wife of Kay Kavus and stepmother of Siyavash, falls in love with Siyavash and attempts to seduce the young prince by inviting him to her private chamber. When Siyavash rejects her sexual advances, Sudabeh becomes enraged and accuses him of raping her. Outraged by his queen’s accusation, the king orders Siyavash to undergo the test of demonstrating his innocence, which requires the accused to ride a horse through a large bonfire created by setting alight an enormous mountain of firewood and timber. Ancient Iranian tradition maintained that if the accused was innocent, he would emerge out of the fire unscathed. If he was guilty, however, the fire would consume him as he rode through it. Confident of his innocence, Siyavash accepts the challenge. He mounts his horse, rides through the bonfire, and survives the ordeal unharmed. Recognizing the falseness of the queen’s allegations, the king orders her to present herself and be questioned. The desperate and embarrassed queen appears before the throne and once again slanders Siyavash to save her own life. Her accusations outrage the king, who orders his henchmen to execute her. At this critical juncture, Siyavash intercedes and begs his father to forgive the queen. The king, who passionately loves his wife, allows her to live. Thus, peace and tranquility are restored to the imperial court.

Though he has established his innocence, Siyavash cannot regain and confidence of his father. When Afrasiyab, the king of Turan and the sworn enemy of the Kayanian dynasty, invades Iran, Siyavash requests that his father assign him to command the Iranian forces. His father consents to the request. Siyavash leads an Iranian army, which includes the hero Rostam, against the Turanians and defeats them. Despite his impressive victory, Siyavash rejects the idea of humiliating the enemy and agrees to negotiate a peace treaty with the Turanians. To ensure the long-term preservation of the treaty, Siyavash demands that the Turanians send 100 hostages, all relatives of their king Afrasiyab, to the Iranian court. The Turanians agree to the terms of

the treaty and send a group of hostages to Iran. When he receives the news that his son has concluded a peace agreement with Iran's greatest enemy, the Kayanian monarch, Kay Kavus, is enraged. He sends a message to Siyavash ordering him to execute all the Turanian hostages who have been sent to his camp and to continue the successful military campaign until the king of Turan, Afrasiyab, has been captured and killed. Siyavash realizes that his father is opposed to any form of peace and reconciliation and can only be satisfied by bloodshed and vengeance. The honorable prince is caught in a dilemma. If he follows his father's orders, he has to break the truce he has negotiated and betray the promises he has made to the Turanians, but if he refuses his father's demands, he has no other choice but to leave the country and abandon his bright future as the crown prince of Iran. As a man of principle, Siyavash refuses to violate the treaty he has signed and chooses instead to leave Iran. He travels to Turan, the historical enemy of Iran, where he seeks the protection of its ruler, Afrasiyab, whom he had recently defeated.

At first, Afrasiyab welcomes Siyavash and showers him with honors and gifts. Afrasiyab also arranges a marriage between his daughter, Farangis, and Siyavash. Thus, the exiled Kayanian prince is converted into the son-in-law of the Turanian king. To demonstrate his confidence and love for his new son-in-law, Afrasiyab offers Siyavash a kingdom within his empire. As the ruler of this kingdom, Siyavash builds a new and beautiful city called Kangdizh (Kangdijh). The cordial relationship between Siyavash and Afrasiyab deteriorates, however, as a result of intrigues by jealous courtiers and members of Afrasiyab's own family, particularly the Turanian king's brother, Garsivaz, who had commanded the Turanian army that Siyavash and his Iranian forces had earlier defeated. After visiting Siyavash, Garsivaz tells his brother, King Afrasiyab, that the Iranian prince is an ambitious and dangerous man because he maintains secret contact with his father, the Iranian king Kay Kavus, and because he covets the Turanian throne for himself. Afrasiyab sends an army against Siyavash, who surrenders without a fight. The Iranian prince is then brought in bondage to the royal court of Turan, where he is beheaded by order of Afrasiyab. Meanwhile, Siyavash's wife, Farangis, gives birth to a boy who is named Kay Khosrow. Farangis and her newly born son manage to escape to Iran, where Kay Khosrow grows up and subsequently emerges as the king and successor to his grandfather, Kay Kavus. To avenge his father's death, Kay Khosrow raises an army and marches against his maternal grandfather, Afrasiyab, whom he defeats and kills after several fierce battles between the Iranian and Turanian armies.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Farangis; Kay Kavus; Kay Khosrow; Rostam

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Tahmures

A king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty of Greater Iran. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, Tahmures appears as the "well-armed" Takhma Urupa who ruled the seven regions of the world and was king to the *daevas* (demons) and men as well as all the *yatus* (wizards) and *pairikas* (witches) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 28). He rides Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit who is "turned into the shape of a horse, all around the earth from one end to the other" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 29). In the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn*, Takhma Urupa appears as Takhmorup Spitur, the son of Vivangahu and a great-grandson of Hoshang (Hoshyang), the second king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.2). In another Pahlavi text, *Dinkard*, he is presented as the "well-armed" king during whose reign "the demon and evil

mankind, the wizard and witch, were smitten" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part V:* Dinkard, 7.19). He also cast out idolatry and propagated "the reverence and service of the creator," converting the evil spirit "into the shape of a horse" who carried him "for thirty years" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part V:* Dinkard, 7.19). He rules for 30 years and is eventually killed and devoured by Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 34.4). Tahmures is succeeded on the throne by his brother Yima, who appears as Jamshid in the legendary history of Iran.

In the writings of the Persian historians of the Islamic era, Tahmures received the title "Divband" (Demon Binder). During the Islamic era, a number of mythological events were attributed to Tahmures. For example, the scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni relates that Tahmurath (Tahmures) "on receiving the warning of the Deluge—231 years before the Deluge—ordered his people to select a place of good air and soil in his realm," and they could not find "a place that answered better to this description than Ispahan [Isfahan]" (Biruni: 28, 11). Having identified Isfahan as a place of best air and soil, Tahmures orders "all scientific books to be preserved for posterity, and to be buried in a part of that place, least exposed to obnoxious influences" (Biruni: 28, 11).

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, he appears as Tahmures, the son of Hushang, the king of the Pishdadian dynasty. Upon ascending the throne, Tahmures declares that he will dedicate his reign to cleansing the world of evil. In pursuing this goal, he raises an army, attacks the demons, kills two-thirds of them, and captures and imprisons the remaining one-third. His victory over the demons earns him the title "Divband" (Demon Binder). Humbled by Tahmures, the demons attempt to reach a compromise with him: they promise that if he keeps them alive, they will be willing to teach him some of their secrets. Tahmures agrees, and the demons teach him how to write in 30 languages. Tahmures also introduces the technique of breeding new animals and teaches people the art of spinning and weaving wool. Thus, he is credited with inventing clothes and draperies. He tames hawks, and he also trains falcons and cheetahs to assist humans in hunting wild animals, while at the same time bringing cocks and hens to crow at drumbeat. After ruling for 30 years, Tahmures dies and is succeeded by his son, Jamshid.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Gayomard; Hushang; Jamshid

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Zab/Zav

A king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, Zab (Zav) appears as the holy Uzava, the son of Tumaspa (New Persian: Tahmasp) (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 131). In the Zoroastrian text *Bundahishn* appears as Auzobo who finds a child abandoned in a waist cloth on a river. The child is frozen and trembling on a doorsill (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.24). Auzobo takes in the frozen child and adopts him as his own son (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 31.24). This child is named Kavata (Kavad; New Persian: Qobad) and emerges later as the first king of the Kayanian dynasty.

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Uzava appears as Zab. Upon the death of the king of Iran, Manuchehr, his son Nowzar ascends the throne of Iran. Weak, self-indulgent, greedy, gluttonous, and incompetent, Nowzar alienates his commanders and government officials as well as the ordinary people from the throne. Despite repeated warnings from his dignitaries, the king fails to address the growing weakness and chaos in his kingdom. With Iran in shambles, the shrewd and opportunistic ruler of Turan, Afrasiyab, marches his army against Nowzar. Despite their heroic performance on the battlefield, the Iranians are defeated, and Nowzar is captured by the enemy. The humbled and disgraced Iranian monarch is brought to Afrasiyab, who decapitates the deposed king with his own sword. Though Nowzar has two sons, the Iranian dignitaries refuse to allow them to ascend the throne, as they are believed to lack sufficient training and qualities to rule. With the royal line of Nowzar coming to a sudden end, the court dignitaries select an old and wise member of the Iranian nobility, Zab or Zav (Uzava of the *Avesta*), as the new ruler. When Zab dies, his son

Garshasp ascends the throne.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Kay Qobad; Rostam; Zal

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Zahhak

A demonic creature who personifies evil and plays an important role in the legendary history of ancient Iran. In the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy scripture, Zahhak (Dahak) appears as Azhi Dahaka (Dragon), a "three-headed, the three-mouthed and the six-eyed" monster who "has a thousand senses" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 29, 34). He is "the most powerful, fiendish Druj [the lie], that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu [the evil spirit] created against the material world, to destroy the world of good principle" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 34). The Azhi Dahaka of the *Avesta* worships Aredvi Sura Anahita, the goddess of waters, in a castle in the land of Bawri, which has been identified by some scholars as Babylon (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 29). The principal opponent of Azhi Dahaka in the *Avesta* is Thraetaona, "the heir of the valiant Athwya clan" who offers a sacrifice in Varena (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 33). Thraetaona also pleads with the goddess Anahita to give him a boon so that he can overcome and defeat Azhi Dahaka (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 34).

In the legendary history of Iran, Zahhak appears as an evil and tyrannical king. He receives an actual genealogy and becomes a great-grandson of Siyamak (the son of the first man and the first ruler Gayomard [Gayomart]) on his father's side, and a descendant of the evil spirit Ahriman, on his mother's side. In the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the Persian epic poet Ferdowsi portrays Zahhak as the son of an Arab king. While the father is a generous and compassionate ruler, the son, Zahhak, is a scheming, devious, shrewd, ruthless, and brutal

prince. His demonic personality and traits attract the devil, who approaches Zahhak and encourages him to murder his father so that he can ascend the throne. Although Zahhak initially resists the temptation to kill his father, he is eventually convinced to participate in a plot hatched by the devil to eliminate his father. After the devil murders his father, Zahhak assumes the reins of power. The devil now reappears as a master in culinary arts, feeding Zahhak the most delicious and scrumptious dishes. Greatly impressed by his skillful and gifted chef, the king asks the devil whether he has a wish that he can fulfill. The devil responds that his only wish is to express his love for Zahhak by kissing his shoulders. When the tyrant consents to his request, the devil kisses the king's shoulders. Shortly after this encounter, two serpents grow on Zahhak's shoulders from the spots kissed by the devil. It is therefore not surprising that in the Persian literature Zahhak is called *Mardush* (Serpent/Snake Shoulder).

Frightened by the appearance of the two snakes on his shoulders, Zahhak consults with physicians, but none can offer a remedy. The devil appears once again, this time as a healer and a physician, and prescribes a remedy. The remedy is to feed each serpent the brains of young men daily. Zahhak accepts the devil's remedy as the only solution for his condition and orders his henchmen to detain and kill young men and feed their brains to the serpents on his shoulders.

Meanwhile, the legendary king Jamshid has lost his glory (*khvarnah* or *farr*) after he has declared himself divine. With the king's loss of divine glory, his kingdom plunges into a long period of chaos. In a desperate attempt to choose a successor to Jamshid, court dignitaries agree to invite Zahhak to assume the reins of power. Once he ascends the throne, Zahhak embarks on a long search for Jamshid. When he finally succeeds in capturing the disgraced king, the evil Zahhak orders Jamshid's body to be sawn in half.

Having split Jamshid into two pieces, Zahhak ascends the throne, takes Jamshid's two sisters as hostage, and rules with oppression and injustice for 1,000 years. The demonic nature of the evil king continues to unfold, represented by the incessant demands by the two serpents on his shoulders for human brains. To calm the hunger of the two hungry serpents, Zahhak continues to feed them the brains of young men. Though outraged by his tyranny and savagery, Zahhak's frightened and intimidated subjects do not protest for fear of retribution. Rebellion against Zahhak erupts suddenly, however, when the sons of the blacksmith Kaveh are seized and transported to the palace. Kaveh is not willing to allow his sons to be murdered by the king's henchmen without a public airing of his grievances. He marches to the royal palace to protest the intolerable oppression and injustice of Zahhak. Zahhak responds to Kaveh's objections by ordering the

release of the blacksmith's sons. In return for showing compassion, Zahhak demands that Kaveh sign a proclamation that declares Zahhak to be a just ruler. An outraged Kaveh tears up the proclamation and storms out of the palace. As he leaves the palace, Kaveh lifts his blacksmith's leather apron aloft on a long pole to use as his standard. Crowds gather around Kaveh, and his protest quickly turns into a mass uprising. The rebellious blacksmith and his supporters march to the Alborz Mountains seeking Fereydun, son of Abtin (Aptin), a descendant of King Jamshid, who lives in hiding, fearing for his life. Fereydun is brought forth from his hiding place and hailed as the legitimate king. He then marches at the head of an army and captures Zahhak at his palace. The demonic tyrant is then dragged in chains to a cave at the summit of Mount Damavand, in the Alborz mountain range of northern Iran. With Fereydun ascending the throne, power is restored to the rightful line of kings of the Pishdadian dynasty, and peace and justice are restored.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Faranak; Fereydun; Jamshid; Kaveh

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Zal

Zal (pronounced as Zāl) or Dastan (pronounced as Dastān) is one of the greatest legendary heroes in the mythological history of Greater Iran. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Zal appears as the father of Rostam, the greatest legendary warrior of ancient Iran. Zal himself is the son of Sam (pronounced as Sām) and the grandson of Nariman (pronounced as Narimān), both legendary heroes in Iranian mythology. Because Dastan is born with snowy white hair, he is called Zal, which is the word for "albino" in Persian. Sam, who blames the evil spirit, or Ahriman, for the "curious" and "unusual" appearance of his son,

curses his fate and decides to abandon the infant Zal in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran. The child cries out in his loneliness, hunger, and desperation until he is observed by the wise and powerful bird Simorgh, who is hunting for food to feed her young. Simorgh carries the infant to her nest. Having rescued the child, Simorgh adopts Zal as her own son, nursing, feeding, and raising him in her nest. The abandoned infant grows up to become a strong and handsome man. Meanwhile, Sam, a vassal of the king of Iran, Manuchehr, becomes the ruler of Sistan in present-day eastern Iran. One night Sam has a dream that awakens him to the realization that he should search for his abandoned son. The aging king regrets his decision to forsake his son and embarks on a journey to recover him. In the search for his lost son, Sam travels to the mountains of northern Iran. After pleading with God to return his son safely to him, Sam finally discovers Zal. At first the young man refuses to abandon his adopted mother, Simorgh, and return to his father, but after the bird promises him a brilliant future and hands him samples of her feathers, Zal descends from the mountain and joins his father. Simorgh assures Zal that in times of need, despair, and peril he should throw one of the feathers into a fire, and the bird will appear at once to guide and assist him. These individual feathers from Simorgh would play an important role in the life of Zal and his family, particularly in the heroic feats of his son, Rostam.

Upon his arrival at the court of Sam, Zal is appointed heir to the throne. In the absence of his father, who has to travel, Zal manages the affairs of the kingdom and emerges as the de facto ruler of his vast domain. As a king, he rules with compassion, wisdom, justice, and righteousness. He also becomes a highly educated and learned man in various fields of knowledge. Soon the young and handsome Zal falls in love with a beautiful princess, Rudabeh, the daughter of Mehrab, the king of Kabulestan, who traces his lineage to the serpent-shouldered king Zahhak. Arranging a meeting with his love Rudabeh, who cannot leave the palace without permission from her father, proves to be a difficult task. Worse, Zal does not trust Rudabeh's father, who has a reputation for cruelty and harshness. Using a hunting trip as a pretext, Zal and his companions set up a camp and pitch their tents across the river from Kabul. Rudabeh and her ladies-in-waiting also resort to a ruse and, under the pretext of enjoying their day on the riverbank, convince the king of Kabul to allow them to leave the palace. While the princess and her attendants are relaxing and enjoying their time on the riverbank, Zal discharges an arrow and kills a bird, which lands conveniently near the camp of the royal party. This allows Zal to send his own attendants to fetch the bird and use the occasion as an opportunity to initiate a conversation with the royal party from Kabul.

The two groups meet and, having established a cordial rapport, decide to throw a party packed with eating, singing, and dancing. Zal uses the new relationship between the two camps to send special gifts to Rudabeh and request a meeting with the princess.

When Zal and Rudabeh finally unite, they immediately fall in love. Their decision to get married, however, is opposed by their parents and King Manuchehr, who makes excuses and creates obstacles to discourage the lovers and derail their plan. The love of the young couple and their persistence eventually prevail, however, and the king and their parents agree to the marriage. A magnificent wedding ceremony is organized in Kabul to celebrate the union of Zal and Rudabeh. Sometime after the wedding, Rudabeh becomes pregnant. The enormous size of the unborn child, however, threatens the life and well-being of his mother. Fearing the loss of his wife and child, Zal throws one of the feathers Simorgh had handed him into the fire. The wise bird immediately appears and, upon examining the condition of Rudabeh, orders Zal to move one of the feathers as a knife across Rudabeh's abdomen, thereby applying a Caesarean section procedure. In this manner Rostam, the greatest legendary hero of Greater Iran, is born. Many years later, Simorgh would resurface to assist Rostam in his confrontation against Esfandiyar, the crown prince of Goshtasp, a king of the Kayanian dynasty, and the first monarch to adopt Zoroastrianism as his religion.

Illustration from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] depicts the wedding of the legendary hero Zal to Rudabeh, the daughter of Mehrab, the king of Kabul. Zal and Rudabeh had two sons, Rostam and Zavareh. In *Shahnameh*, Rostam emerges as Greater Iran's most accomplished hero. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Zal continues with his illustrious career, replacing his father Sam as the ruler of Zabol while at the same time serving the kings of Greater Iran as an army commander. Toward the end of his long life, Zal confronts several tragedies. First, he has to witness the battle between his son Rostam and Esfandiyar, which results in the death of the Kayanian crown prince. Zal also witnesses the death of his two sons, Rostam and Zavareh, in a conspiracy hatched by the king of Kabul.

Although several theories exist regarding the historical origins of the legend of Zal and Rudabeh, there is a general consensus among scholars of ancient Iran that the story can be traced back to the northern Iranian Saka (Scythian) people who settled in the eastern Iranian province of Sistan (Sakastan) during the reign of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE).

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Esfandiyar; Faramarz; Rostam

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PEOPLES, EMPIRES, ADMINISTRATIONS, AND MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

OVERVIEW ESSAY

This chapter provides the reader with entries on the political, administrative, and military structure and practices of the empires that ruled Greater Iran in the pre-Islamic era, namely the Medes, the Achaemenids, the Seleucids, the Arsacids (Parthians), and the Sasanians. It also includes entries on prominent military commanders and leaders of the time, including the Sogdian general Spitaman; the Bactrian satrap Bessus, who murdered King Darius III in an attempt to ascend the Achaemenid throne; and Ariobarzanes, the illustrious Persian general who fought Alexander the Great and his army as they marched toward the Persian capital at Persepolis.

Much of what is known to us regarding the organization and administration of the pre-Islamic Iranian empires comes from contemporary writings of the time. Two entries in this chapter describe such prominent and informative works as *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr* [Provincial Capitals of Iran], a book of geography written in Middle Persian, the language of the pre-Islamic Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE), and *Parthian Stations*, which was composed in Greek. *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr* lists and describes the important cities of Greater Iran during the reign of the Sasanian dynasty. The book relies on a mixture of historical, religious, and legendary sources, such as traditional stories and myths from ancient Iran and various accounts from the Zoroastrian scripture, the *Avesta.* The date of initial composition for *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr* is unknown, but the book was clearly revised several times during Sasanian times and into the Islamic era.

Parthian Stations, the other work discussed in this chapter, offers an account of the main overland trade route from the Levant to India in the first century BCE. Within its descriptions of the towns and

settlements situated along the way, we can glimpse something of the organizational and administrative structure of the far-flung Arsacid (Parthian) Empire, which stretched from the Euphrates River in present-day southern Turkey to Arachosia in modern-day southern Afghanistan.

Efficient transportation systems, whether by land or sea, were one of the most prominent features of the administration and organization of Iran's pre-Islamic empires. Long before the author of *Parthian Stations* had set foot on the overland routes that crossed Parthian territory, the Achaemenid king Darius I had established the Royal Road, one of the most efficient communication links to be found in the ancient world. Traversing some 1,678 miles (2,700 kilometers), the Royal Road connected the Achaemenid winter capital of Susa in southwestern Iran to the city of Sardis in western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Royal messengers could travel the route in seven days, ferrying news and information from various provinces of the empire to the capital at Susa. At each of the 111 post-stations found along the Royal Road, fresh horses, supplies, and even overnight lodging awaited the royal courtiers.

The empires of ancient Iran developed complex political formations in order to govern the diverse lands and peoples under their rule. Many communities within each empire's boundaries already possessed their own unique social organization along with a unique linguistic, ethnic, or religious identity. The task of each succeeding empire in ancient Iran was to govern such vast territories successfully, quelling rebellions where they arose while maintaining prosperous communities and provinces that could add to the empire's wealth and power. Each empire learned from the mistakes and successes of its predecessors.

Beginning with the earliest, our knowledge of the administrative structure of the Median Empire is scanty, but the Medes most probably preserved much of the Assyrian administrative system that had previously governed them. Local kings and chiefs within the empire maintained their privileged status and position as autonomous rulers as long as they paid an annual tribute to the Median king and provided him with troops during his campaigns.

When the Median Empire was overthrown by Cyrus II (r. 558–530 BCE) in 550 BCE, the new Persian Achaemenid dynasty likewise adopted the administrative practices of its former Median overlords. Once the Achaemenids under Cyrus had expanded their empire to encompass Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Central Asia—territories containing diverse geographical regions and a multitude of different ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities—a new and more elaborate administrative structure was developed.

Beginning with Cyrus II and continuing during the long reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), the Persian Achaemenids divided their empire into 20 provinces, or satrapies. For each, the Persian king would appoint a governor, or satrap. The satrap was responsible for collecting taxes and maintaining security in the area he governed. Each satrap had his own army and could use it to defend the province he ruled. Satraps also provided troops to the king's cavalry and infantry forces during times of conflict. They were, in effect, tax collectors, law enforcement officials, and army recruiters as well as direct representatives of the Persian king.

After Alexander the Macedon entered Persian territory and defeated Darius III (336–330 BCE), the last king of the Achaemenid dynasty, a much more fragmented governance and administration took hold in ancient Persia. The Seleucids who succeeded Alexander focused their attentions on the western regions of their empire, transferring their capital city from Seleucia-on-Tigris to a new capital, Antioch, in northern Syria (present-day southern Turkey). The long distance between the new capital and the faraway eastern provinces of the empire in Greater Iran allowed the governors of these distant regions to revolt and establish their own independent kingdoms. In addition, various nomadic groups in Central Asia took this opportunity to invade the eastern provinces of the Seleucid Empire, dislodge the Seleucid-appointed governors, and establish their own dynasties. The founder of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty, Arshak or Arsaces, was one of these nomadic chiefs who created his own kingdom after invading northeastern Iran. The vast empire that his successors would eventually create would take its name from his original base in Parthia.

As with the Median Empire, what we know of the administrative structure of the Parthian state under the Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) remains insufficient and sparse. The Arsacids inherited the administrative practices of the Achaemenids and the Seleucids who preceded them as well as the traditions of governance that they brought with them from Central Asia. Although they maintained a less centralized government, the Arsacids preserved the system of satrapies established under the Achaemenids. In addition, great and ancient feudal families, in effect Parthian nobility, ruled virtually as autonomous kings within their own provinces. Such a system was ripe for rebellions, which erupted frequently in these provinces. The succession process used by Parthian kings was unusual and frequently ignited inner dynastic rivalries and even outright wars. In theory, any male member of the Arsacid royal family could assume the reins of power. In practice, the Arsacid monarch was usually succeeded by his oldest son, but there were instances when a brother succeeded a

deceased monarch. The process was further complicated by the existence of two councils, which played an important role in the selection of the new king. In extraordinary circumstances, the Parthian system allowed for a queen to rule as regent and assume power in the name of her underage son.

The Sasanian dynasty, which overthrew the Parthian state in 224 CE, did away with the decentralized structure used by the Arsacids. In its place, the Sasanians established an absolutist monarchy and a highly centralized political and administrative structure. Local feudal kings who refused to obey the authority of the Sasanian king of kings were replaced by members of the Sasanian royal family. However, the powerful landowning families who enjoyed such high status under Parthian rule retained their vast landholdings and special privileges. The Sasanians also established Zoroastrianism as the state religion of their empire, investing the Zoroastrian clergy with enormous power and influence.

Achaemenid Army

The Achaemenid army was the backbone of the Achaemenid state. The army served as the principal instrument for maintaining order in the empire. As the Achaemenid state grew from a small kingdom in southern Iran to the largest empire the world had ever seen, the Persian army went through a major transformation. The armies of Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the state, consisted of Persian tribal units, which had initially supported his rebellion against the Medes. As the small Persian state expanded and converted itself into an empire, the Achaemenid monarchs developed a professional army. As displayed by the magnificent wall carvings of Persepolis in southern Iran, the core units of the standing army were recruited from the Persians and the Medes. The “royal cavalry guard and the ‘Immortals’ composed the core of this standing army” (Frye: 104). According to Herodotus, the Immortals corps “was known as the Immortals, because it was invariably kept up to strength; if a man was killed or fell sick, the vacancy he left was at once filled, so that its strength was never more nor less than 10,000” (Herodotus: 7.83). The pool for recruiting the Achaemenid army was vast and deep, as ancient Persians were educated in the art of warfare since childhood. As young boys, they learned how to ride and draw bows. Sport events and hunting expeditions were organized as the means of military training.

The Achaemenid army reflected the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of the Persian Empire. It was a multinational force, which

included fighting men from the diverse communities that resided in the empire. Commanders of infantry units were mostly Persians, related to the king either by blood or marriage. The army units were divided into units of tens, hundreds, and thousands (Herodotus: 7.81). Before embarking on a campaign, spies were dispatched to collect information on the ruler and the country that was about to be attacked. Prior to a military campaign, all army units assembled in a gathering place for inspection. The tradition among the Persians was to begin a march after sunrise (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.8). The signal for the march was given by trumpet from the king's tent. To make the king's tent visible to all, "a representation of the sun gleamed in a crystal case" above it (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.8). The "order of the line of march was as follows: in front, on silver alters, was carried the fire which the Persians called sacred and eternal" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.9). After the fire alters came the magi singing hymns, "followed by 365 young men in scarlet cloaks, their number equaling the days of the year," then "the chariot consecrated to Jupiter [Ahura Mazda], drawn by white horses, followed by a horse of extraordinary size, which the Persians called 'the Sun's horse'" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.9). Next came various cavalry units, including "the cavalry of twelve nations variously armed"; the Immortals, "10,000 in number"; the "15,000 men called 'the king's kinsmen'"; and finally the unit that looked after the king's wardrobe (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.13–14). All these units "preceded the royal chariot on which rode the king himself, towering above all others" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.15). The king appeared in magnificent attire: "his tunic was purple, interwoven with white at the center, and his gold-embroidered cloak bore a gilded motif of hawks, attacking each other with their beaks" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.17). His "royal head-dress" was "encircled by a blue ribbon flecked with white" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.19). A unit of "10,000 spearman carrying lances" followed "the king's chariot, and to the right and left he was attended by some 200 of his most noble relatives" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.21). At the end of this column came 30,000 foot soldiers followed by 400 of the king's horses. The female members of the royal family, including the king's mother, wives, concubines, children, and their attendants and nurses accompanied the king in his campaigns. They were guarded among others by "a troop of women" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 3.3.22).

Detail of two life-sized royal archers from the palace of the Persian Achaemenid monarch, Darius I the Great, at Susa in southwestern Iran. The Persian archers formed one of the most important units within the Achaemenid army. (Victor Duruy. *The History of Greece and of the Greek People,* 1890)

The Achaemenid state was originally a land power. As the boundaries of the empire expanded and reached the shores of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, the Achaemenids turned their attention to establishing Persian supremacy on the eastern Mediterranean and launched a navy. The Achaemenian navy was "the domain of Phoenicians and to some extent the Inonian" and Cyprian Greeks, but Iranian marines constituted an important component of the Achaemenian naval forces and "fought on the ships" (Frye: 107). The Phoenicians had joined the Persian navy of their own free will and enjoyed enormous power in the military decision-making process. For example, when the Achaemenid king Cambyses II ordered his fleet to attack Carthage, the Phoenicians "refused to go, because of the

close bond which connected Phoenicia and Carthage" (Herodotus: 3.19). With the Phoenicians "out of it and the remainder of the naval force too weak to undertake the campaign alone, the Carthaginians escaped Persian domination" (Herodotus: 3.19). Darius, who wished to know where Indus joined the Indian Ocean, sent an expedition down the river under the command of the Inonian naval admiral Scylax of Caryanda (Herodotus: 4.44). The naval expedition followed the course of the river eastward until it reached the ocean; then, "returning westward, the ships followed the coast, and after a voyage of some thirty months," reached Egypt (Herodotus: 4.44). This allowed Darius to make regular use of the Indian Ocean and complete his conquest of the Indus Valley (Herodotus: 4.44).

While the Achaemenid army was the principal instrument of territorial expansion and preservation of security and order, military might was used not only to wage war but also to conduct co-option and peace. To the astonishment of their enemies, the Achaemenid kings generally treated the rulers they defeated with kindness and magnanimity. According to Herodotus, Cyrus treated Astyages, the defeated king of Media, "with great consideration and kept him at his court until he died" (Herodotus: 1.130). Cyrus displayed the same benevolent generosity and forgiveness toward Croesus, the king of Lydia (Herodotus: 1.88–91). If a king sought peace he was pardoned, and at times he or one of his sons was restored on the throne. There are "many instances from which one may infer that this sort of generosity" and compassion was a common practice among ancient Iranians (Herodotus: 3.15). As Herodotus remarked, the Persians were in "the habit of treating the sons of the kings with honor, and even of restoring to their sons the thrones of those who have rebelled against them" (Herodotus: 3.15). If, however, after being defeated and pardoned a king tried to organize a revolt among his people, he was condemned to death.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes I; Artaxerxes II; Artaxerxes III; Cambyses II; Cyrus II the Great; Darius I; Darius II; Darius III; Xerxes I; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Primary Documents: Document 11; Document 15; Document 18; Document 19

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Achaemenid Empire

Cyrus II the Great founded what came to be known as the Persian Achaemenid Empire in 550 BCE. Alexander the Macedon overthrew the Achaemenid Empire 200 years later in 330 BCE. Cyrus created his empire by defeating the three major powers of the ancient Near East, namely Media, Lydia, and Babylonia; these conquests allowed him to incorporate vast territories into his kingdom. His oldest son and successor, Cambyses II (r. 530–522 BCE), conquered Egypt. The empire reached its zenith during the long reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE). Under Darius I, Persian rule extended to Libya in North Africa, Thrace and Macedonia in Southeast Europe, and the Indus River basin in South Asia. The Achaemenid Empire continued to prosper during the reigns of Darius's son Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE) and Xerxes's successor, Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE).

Following the death of Artaxerxes I, a long period of decline set in. Court intrigues, palace coups, and rebellions in various provinces of the empire undermined the power and legitimacy of the central government. Alexander of Macedon invaded the Achaemenid Empire in 334 BCE and defeated the armies of Darius III, the last Achaemenid king, in three battles. The first occurred in 334 BCE after the Macedonians crossed to Asia at Granikos, where Alexander was almost killed; the second was at Issus in southern Anatolia near the present-day Turkish city of Iskandarun in 333 BCE; and the last was the Battle of Gaugamela or Arbela, which was fought in present-day northern Iraq in October 331 BCE. Darius III was murdered by his own generals while fleeing east in 330 BCE. The Macedonian army occupied the Achaemenid capitals of Susa, Persepolis, and Ecbatana. In a drunken eruption of rage and revenge, Alexander and his commanders set afire and destroyed the Achaemenid palace complex of Persepolis, which had been built by Darius I and his successors.

The vast Achaemenid Empire contained numerous geographical regions as well as a mosaic of religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities. Thus, heterogeneity constituted the most important

characteristic of the empire. The population of the empire included Iranian-speaking groups such as Scythians, Chorasmians, Sogdians, Bactrians, Parthians, Medes, and Persians as well as non-Iranian groups, including Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Berbers, Colchians (western Georgians), Egyptians, Elamites, Greeks, Indians, Jews, and many others. Each group was distinguished by its own unique language, culture, and social organization. The sheer size of the empire and the heterogeneity of its population required a highly organized and efficient administrative structure as well as a system of roads, highways, and canals that linked the four corners of the king's domain. It also necessitated a policy of religious and cultural tolerance that allowed the Achaemenid kings to present themselves as benevolent and just rulers and protectors of their subjects. To maintain the unity and territorial integrity of their empire, the Achaemenid kings had to recognize and respect the validity and legitimacy of local customs, traditions, and practices. Imposing a highly centralized political system, which ignored the power and importance of local elites and pre-Achaemenid administrative practices, could have ignited antigovernment sentiments and revolts. It is not surprising therefore that the hallmark of Achaemenid rule was its religious tolerance as well as its political and administrative flexibility and elasticity. Achaemenid rulers frequently displayed a readiness to delegate authority to local and provincial power centers as long as these accepted the sovereignty of the Achaemenid state and agreed to collect tribute and taxes for the central government.

Fragment of a relief depicts a man holding a covered cup, from the Achaemenid period, late sixth to fifth century BCE. (Yale Gallery of Art)

The Achaemenid kings ruled their empire from their winter capital of Susa (modern-day Shush) in southwestern Iran and their summer capital of Hagmatana/Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) in western Iran. During the remainder of the year, they resided either in Babylon in southern Iraq or in Persepolis in southern Iran. Each of these urban and administrative centers contained royal palace complexes, which housed the members of the royal family as well as those who served their daily needs.

An Achaemenid king was surrounded by a retinue of servants, eunuchs, cooks, musicians, dancers, bodyguards, etc., who attended to his every need. The Persian and Median army units constituted the backbone of the Achaemenid state. Every effort was made to use the Achaemenid army only as a last resort. The Achaemenid kings preferred to resolve local disputes through the intervention of

governors and local elites who had agreed to collaborate with the king. The king and his army only intervened when there was a clear indication that a rebellion posed a direct threat to the security of the state and that the local officials and army units lacked the capability to suppress it effectively.

Although in theory the power of the Persian monarch was absolute, he ruled at the center of a complex network of personal and political relationships. The Achaemenid kings divided their empire into provinces ruled by a governor, or satrap. Each satrap was responsible for collecting taxes and providing security and order in his province. He had to ensure that trade, commerce, and cultivation of land would not be interrupted and that annual taxes and tributes from his province would be sent to the king's court at a prearranged time. As the representative of the king, satraps enjoyed sufficient power and autonomy to suppress any rebellion that undermined the authority of the central government and disrupted the social and economic life of the communities under their rule. This administrative system was replicated by future dynasties, including the Arsacids/Parthians, the Kushans, and the Sasanians.

Achaemenid Empire

The emergence of the Persian Achaemenid Empire as a world power in the sixth century BCE was an event of foremost significance in the history of the ancient Near East, North Africa, Southeast Europe, Central Asia, and indeed the world. The Achaemenids not only created the first world empire but also introduced a world civilization that provided peace, prosperity, and economic

development to a vast region extending from the Syr Darya (Jaxartes River) in Central Asia to the Nile River in Egypt and from the Indus River Valley in western India to the Danube River in Southeastern Europe. The two and a half centuries of Achaemenid rule profoundly transformed the societies and economies of numerous peoples in the ancient Near East, Central Asia, and North Africa. The impact of the Achaemenid state on the countries and societies it ruled lasted for many centuries after its downfall in 330 BCE.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Artaxerxes I; Artaxerxes II; Artaxerxes III; Cambyses II; Cyrus II the Great; Darius I; Darius II; Darius III; Xerxes I; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Primary Documents: Document 11; Document 15; Document 18; Document 19

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Administration

The empires of ancient Iran were vast and complex polities and contained diverse geographical regions as well as numerous ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. Each community possessed its own unique social organization as well as its own unique identity. In the traditional Iranian political system, the king stood on the top of the power pyramid. As the leader and protector of his people, the king was obligated to preserve the peace, security, and stability of the kingdom he ruled. The government was usually an extension of the king's private household, and government officials were the personal servants of their royal master, who were appointed and dismissed in accordance with the king's decision. The political structure was divided into a central administration and a provincial administration.

The administration of justice constituted the most important duty of a sovereign. The king's palace was the brain center of the empire while at the same time serving as the residence of the king. The king lived in the inner section of the palace, which was attached to the royal harem where the female members of the royal family, including the king's mother, his queen, concubines, and children resided. Since proximity to the king determined the power and status of an individual, the king's personal attendants and servants, particularly the royal eunuchs who were also responsible for the protection of the royal harem, enjoyed a great deal of power and influence. Aside from the eunuchs, women of the royal harem also played a prominent role in the daily life of the palace.

Median Empire. Our knowledge of the administrative structure of the Median Empire is scanty. Physical evidence on the history of the Medes and the political and administrative institutions of their empire is meager. Archaeological excavations at Median sites in western Iran have so far produced valuable but scanty results. The Assyrian royal inscriptions as well as Babylonian chronicles do shed some light on isolated events and encounters between the Medes and their neighbors but do not provide any clear outline of Median history and politics. In one Assyrian inscription, we read that the Assyrian army attacked and defeated the Medes, devastating and destroying the royal city of a Median chief as well as 1,200 of his cities. The references to the Medes in Assyrian inscriptions portray a society divided into numerous communities and fortified towns, each led by its own powerful chieftain who ruled from his own walled fortress. There was, however, no single ruler or central government that controlled the whole of Median territory. This disunity allowed Assyrian kings to attack and punish those Median chiefs who had become too powerful and refused to pay tribute: their towns were raided by Assyrian armies, which carried off booty in the form of people, horses, mules, camels, cattle, and sheep. To establish tighter control over these Median chiefs, several Assyrian monarchs appointed provincial governors responsible for collecting taxes. The power struggle and squabbling among Median chiefs reached such a point that on one occasion several Median leaders brought gifts to the Assyrian court at Nineveh and sought the protection of the Assyrian king against their own vassals, who had challenged their authority. The Assyrian king used the infighting among the Medes to impose his authority over them, exacting tribute and taxes from their chieftains. Despite the fragmentation and infighting that engrossed the Medes, they had become sufficiently powerful to force the later Assyrian monarchs to conclude vassal treaties. By the time Ashurbanipal (r. 668–627 BCE) ascended the Assyrian throne, the Medes had formed independent and

powerful states. The Assyrian king mentions his military campaign against a Median chieftain as well as against Median cities, carrying their spoils back with him to the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. There is, however, no reference to Median chiefs paying tribute to the Assyrian king or appealing to him to intervene in their internal conflicts.

The Greek historian Herodotus identifies a certain Deioces (Old Iranian: Dahyuka) as the first independent Median leader, a man "of great ability and ambitions" who revolted against the authority of the Assyrian state in an attempt to free his people (Herodotus: 1.96). Herodotus claims that Deioces was the son of a Median by the name of Phraortes. Herodotus portrays Deioces as a highly intelligent leader who was troubled by the weakness of his people. Early in his career, Deioces built a solid reputation for himself as an honorable mediator. As his reputation as an enforcer of strict justice spread beyond his district, "everyone was glad to submit cases to his judgment, until he became the only person they would turn to" (Herodotus: 1.96–97). Because he had distinguished himself as a just ruler, the Medes chose Deioces as their first king. Deioces used his newly acquired power to compel his people to first build a palace and then a capital city for their new ruler. Thus, Herodotus attributed the founding and construction of the Median capital, Hagmatana or Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) in present-day western Iran, to Deioces. The Greek author described Ecbatana as a city "of great size and strength fortified by concentric walls," designed in such a way that "each successive circle was higher than the one below it by the height of the battlements" (Herodotus: 1.98). Once the construction of the new capital was completed, Deioces introduced his people, the Medes, to the ceremonies attendant to royalty: "admission to the king's presence was forbidden, and all communication had to be through messengers. Nobody was allowed to see the king, and it was an offence for anyone to laugh or spit in the royal presence" (Herodotus: 1.99). The Median king also consolidated his power by the "strict administration of justice" and the creation of a network of spies who "were busy watching and listening in every corner of his dominions" (Herodotus: 1.100). Having unified the various Median rural communities and townships under his authority, Deioces died after a long reign of 53 years (Herodotus: 1.101). He was succeeded by his son Phraortes, who had been named after his grandfather.

According to Herodotus, Phraortes (Old Persian: Fravartish) was the second monarch of the Median dynasty and the son of Deioces, who had united the Medes under his rule before his death. Unlike his father, however, Phraortes "was not content to be king only of Media" (Herodotus: 1.102). Having inherited a strong Median state from his father, he expanded the boundaries of his kingdom at the expense of

the neighboring regions and kingdoms. One of the first countries he conquered was Persia. The combined power of Media and Persia allowed Phraortes to embark on the conquest of the ancient Near East. His territorial ambitions eventually brought him face-to-face with the might of Assyria. In a battle against the kingdom of Assyria, Phraortes was defeated and killed together with many of his troops. The conquest and destruction of Assyria would be left to Phraortes's son and successor, Cyaxares. There is no agreement on the dates for Phraortes's reign. Some have argued that he ruled for 22 years, from 675 to 653 BCE, while others have maintained that his rule was considerably longer, extending from 678 to 625 BCE. Scholars have also questioned the accuracy of Herodotus's narrative on the first two rulers of the Median kingdom, particularly his account of Deioces, whom he identified as the first truly independent ruler of the Medes.

The death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE signaled the beginning of the end for the Assyrian kingdom and the rise of a powerful Media. In 615 BCE, after defeating the Scythians who had occupied and ruled Media for nearly three decades, the Medes under the leadership of their king, Huvakhshtra, joined the campaign against Assyria, and in the autumn of that year they crossed the Zagros Mountains and captured Arrapha (present-day Kirkuk in northern Iraq). Then in the summer of 614 Huvakhshtra, who appears as Cyaxares in Herodotus's *Histories*, captured the city of Ashur. The king of Babylonia, who had reached Ashur with his army after it had been seized and destroyed by the Medes, met with the king of Medes outside the city, where the two monarchs agreed to a treaty of peace and friendship. In the summer of 612 BCE, the Babylonians and Medes joined forces and marched against the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, one of the largest cities in the world for nearly half a century and located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in northern Iraq. After a long siege and several fierce battles, the Medes and Babylonians succeeded in conquering the city. The victorious armies plundered and destroyed Nineveh, massacred its population, and carried off into slavery those whose lives they spared. The fall of Nineveh dealt a deathblow to the Assyrian state. Its king, Sin-sharr-ishkun (r. 627–612 BCE), was most probably killed during the final assault.

With the fall of the Assyrian Empire, Media rose as a major power in the Near East. The Medes followed their victory against the Assyrians by annexing the kingdom of Urartu, which was centered on Lake Van in eastern Asia Minor (present-day eastern Turkey). The annexation of Urartu allowed the Medes to emerge as the dominant political and military power in eastern Asia Minor and to become a neighbor of the powerful kingdom of Lydia. From 590 to 585 BCE, the two new neighbors fought several inconclusive battles. In 585 BCE the

king of Medes, Cyaxares, and the ruler of Lydia, Alyattes, finally agreed to cease all hostilities and established the Halys River (Kizil Irmak or Red River in modern-day east-central Turkey) as the boundary between their two states. To strengthen this new peace treaty, the son of Cyaxares married a daughter of Alyattes. Shortly afterward the Median king died and was succeeded by his son, who appears in Herodotus's account as Astyages. The core territory of the Median Empire was present-day western Iran. The Medes did not establish a highly centralized political system. Local vassals accepted the suzerainty of the Median king by paying an annual tribute. In return, they were allowed to maintain full control over their domains. It was one of these vassals, Cyrus II of Anshan, who eventually overthrew the Median state.

Achaemenid Empire. The Median Empire was overthrown by the king of Anshan, Cyrus II, either in 554/553 or 550/549 BCE. The new dynasty founded by Cyrus adopted the administrative practices of the Medes. Once Cyrus expanded his empire to incorporate Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and parts of Central and South Asia, the newly founded empire required a new and more elaborate administrative structure. The principal challenge for a vast empire, which ruled diverse geographical regions and contained numerous ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities with their own social organizations, was how to collect taxes and generate sufficient revenue to pay the salaries of the king's officials and troops. Beginning with Cyrus the Great but particularly during the long reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), the Achaemenids divided their empire into provinces, or satrapies. The Persian king appointed a governor, or satrap, to each province. The satraps were not hereditary rulers. They were appointed by the Persian king and served at the pleasure of their royal master. Every new country or region that had been conquered was assessed for taxes. At times for purely administrative purposes, neighboring regions were joined to a newly conquered area in a single unit (Herodotus: 3.89). The satrap was responsible for maintaining security in the area under his control, making sure that the cultivation of land would not be disrupted. Each satrap had his own army, and he could use it to defend the territory under his jurisdiction. The satraps also provided troops to the king's army during military campaigns, thereby contributing to the central government's cavalry and infantry forces. In a long paragraph in his *Oeconomicus*, the Greek author Xenophon described the relationship between the Persian king and the provincial power centers in the following words:

> We agree that he [the Persian king] is seriously concerned about military matters, because he gives orders to each man [governor]

who is in charge of the countries from which he receives tribute to supply provisions for a specified number of horsemen, archers, slingers, and light-armed troops who will be capable of controlling his subjects and of protecting the country if an enemy should attack. And besides these he maintains guards in the citadels. And the officials to whom this duty has been assigned supplies provisions for the guards. The king holds an annual review of the mercenaries and the other troops who have been ordered to under arms, assembling all of them, except those in the citadels, at the "place of muster." He personally inspects the troops near his own residence and he sends men whom he trusts to review those who live farther away. And those garrison commanders and chiliarchs [commander of a thousand] and satraps who show up with the full complement of soldiers assigned to them and present them equipped with horses that are well groomed and weapons that are well maintained he promotes with honours and rewards with valuable gifts. But those commanders whom he finds either showing a lack of concern for their garrisons or making a private profit from them, he punishes severely, removing them from office and appointing other men to take charge. Furthermore, he himself examines all of the land that he seized as he rides through it, and by sending men whom he trusts he surveys the land he does not examine personally. And those governors whom he observes presenting densely populated land and fields under cultivation stocked with the trees and crops that grow in that region, to these he gives additional territory and he lavishes gifts on them and rewards them with seats of honour; but those whose lands he seized uncultivated and sparsely populated, because of the governor's harshness or arrogance or lack of concern, he punishes, removing them from office and appointing other governors. Since he does these things, does he seem to be less concerned that the earth be well cultivated by the inhabitants than that it be well protected by the garrisons? Separate officials are appointed by him for each of these activities, not the same men: some are in charge of the inhabitants and the workers, and collect tribute from them; others command the armed troops and the garrisons. If the garrison commander does not adequately defend the country the official concerned with the inhabitants and agricultural production brings an accusation against the commander on the grounds that the people are not able to do their work because they are not properly protected. But if the garrison commander provides peace for farming, whereas the civil governor presents under populated, unproductive land, the garrison commander, in turn, brings an accusation against him. For, on the whole, those who cultivate the

> land poorly are unable to support garrisons or pay tribute. But wherever a satrap is appointed, he is concerned with both areas of activity. (Xenophon: IV.5–12)

After the collapse of the Persian Empire in 330 BCE, Alexander and his Macedonian generals continued with the administrative practices of the Achaemenid kings. The short-lived empire of Alexander and the Seleucid state, which succeeded it in Iran, Mesopotamia, and parts of Asia Minor, relied on a system of vassals who paid tribute and taxes to their Seleucid overlords. The Seleucids, who ruled from Antioch in Syria (present-day southern Turkey), also relied on Greek colonies, which had been founded by Alexander during his conquests.

Parthian/Arsacid Empire. Our knowledge of the administrative structure of the Parthian Empire under the Arsacid dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) is insufficient and sparse. The Arsacids inherited the administrative practices of the Achaemenids and the Seleucids as well as their own traditions, which they had brought with them from Central Asia. The Arsacids ruled a vast though highly decentralized empire. In return for accepting the suzerainty of the Arsacid king, local dynasts ruled virtually as autonomous kings. These vassals, however, could not mint their own coins, wear their tiaras upright, and "sleep upon a golden throne[,] … privileges and marks of honor peculiar to the kings of Parthia" (Josephus: 20.3.4). Such a decentralized system was ripe for rebellion, which erupted frequently in the provinces. It also allowed local rulers, particularly on the western frontiers of the empire, to switch sides every time a war erupted with Rome. The instability inherent in a decentralized state structure was reinforced by the Arsacid succession process, which ignited frequent inner-dynastic rivalries and wars. In theory, any male member of the Arsacid royal family could assume the reins of power. According to Justin, the Arsacid monarch was usually succeeded by his oldest son, but there were instances when a brother succeeded a deceased monarch. For example, when Phraates II died he was succeeded by his brother, Mithridates I. The process was further complicated by the existence of two councils, both of which played an important role in the selection of the new king. The Greek author Strabo wrote that the Arsacid monarchs were appointed by two councils, "one that of kinsmen [the Parthian nobility], and the other that of wise men and Magi," but he did not elaborate on how the process worked (Strabo: 11.9.3–10). The Parthian nobility, which consisted of the great feudal families, enjoyed enormous power. They ruled certain regions of the empire as their own kingdoms. Thus, the Suren ruled Sistan in eastern Iran, and the Karen ruled Nahavand in western Iran. These families also owned lands in other parts of the

Parthian Empire and therefore were not confined to only one region. The power of the Suren was reflected in the fact that the head of the family enjoyed the hereditary right to place the crown on the head of a new Arsacid king during the coronation ceremony (Plutarch: 1.812). Each of these families had its own army. When the Parthian state was attacked by foreign powers, the great feudal families rallied around the Arsacid monarch and committed their armies to the defense of the empire. Thus, in 53 BCE Suren (Surena) mobilized an army of 10,000, which fought and defeated a much larger Roman army under the command of Crassus at Carrhae. Under extraordinary circumstances, the Parthian system allowed for a queen to rule as regent and assume the reins of power in the name of her underage son. The emergence of the female slave Musa, who was sent to the Arsacid court as a gift by the Roman emperor Augustus, first as the queen of the Parthian monarch Phraates IV (r. 38–3/2 BCE) and then as the joint ruler of the Arsacid Empire with her son, Phraates V (r. 2 BCE–2 CE), clearly demonstrates how much power and influence a strong-minded and resolute woman could exercise.

As for the provinces, there seems to have been several categories of rulers and governors. The Arsacids preserved the system of satrapies, which existed under the Achaemenids, and may have also added another layer to the provincial power structure by appointing a chief satrap who was responsible for all other satraps. A rock relief at Bisotun in western Iran depicts the Arsacid king Mithridates II and four of his high officials. A Greek inscription identifies one of these dignitaries as Gotarzes (Godarz), satrap of satraps. Another high official is identified as Kophasates (Kohzad), who is described as a "privy councilor" (Bivar: 41).

Sasanian Empire. Ardashir I, who overthrew the Arsacid dynasty in 224 CE and founded the Sasanian state, abolished the decentralized structure he had inherited from the Parthian kings and, in distinct contrast, established a highly centralized political and administrative structure. Additionally, Ardashir's successors reversed the tolerant attitude of the Arsacids toward the religious communities of the empire and introduced Zoroastrianism as the state religion. Local kings who refused to obey the authority of the Sasanian king of kings were replaced by members of the Sasanian royal family, usually the sons of the ruling monarch. This does not mean, however, that the Sasanians destroyed the powerful landowning families, such as the Suren and the Karen. These families retained their vast landholdings and the special privileges they had enjoyed during the Parthian period. Indeed, in the second half of the fifth century CE as the Sasanian state declined and the empire was invaded by nomadic tribes from Central Asia, the power of the landed nobility resurfaced, and

the very families who had played a central role in the decentralized Parthian state began to play an important role in the political life of the empire.

The Sasanian theory of state provided the theoretical foundations of the empire. According to this circular theory, to rule his kingdom, the king of kings needed an army. Maintaining an army required the collection of taxes, which could only be generated by the labor of people. For people to produce revenue and pay their taxes, there had to be peace and security. Peace and security were, however, impossible without justice and law, but justice and law could not be administered and implemented without a ruler and a strong army.

During the reign of Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE) the Sasanian state introduced a series of important reforms. These reforms aimed at curtailing the power of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment. They also intended to broaden the authority of the Sasanian king of kings vis-à-vis the provincial power centers by expanding the size of the central government. The first and perhaps most important of these reforms was restructuring the archaic tax system of the empire. In the traditional system, taxes were levied on the yield of land. Therefore, from year to year the amount of the tax varied. Khosrow abolished the system based on yearly variation and replaced it with a fixed sum.

The Sasanian king also reorganized the administrative structure of his empire. He established a governmental system based on a council of ministers, or divan, headed by a prime minister. For much of his reign, the wise and capable chief minister, Bozorg Mihr, played a central role in running a well-oiled and highly efficient bureaucracy for his royal master. Khosrow I also empowered the lower gentry, or *dihgans* (*dihqans*), and reduced the power of the great feudal families who enjoyed enormous influence in the royal court. This did not mean, however, that he attacked the privileges of the dominant economic classes by transforming the prevailing power structure. In fact, both Sasanian and Islamic sources emphasize Khosrow's defense and protection of the traditional division of Iranian society into several distinct social and occupational strata, namely priests, warriors, government officials, and members of the fourth estate, which included peasant farmers, artisans, and merchants (*Nameh-ye Tansar:* 57).

An important institution reorganized by Khosrow was the Sasanian military. To centralize the decision-making process under his direct control, the post of supreme commander in chief (*erān espahbad* or *arteshtārān sālār*) was abolished and replaced by four commanders, or *spahbads*, responsible for the security of the eastern, western, northern, and southern regions of the empire (Tabari: 2.646). Each

commander reported directly to the Sasanian king. He also appointed margraves, or commanders of the frontiers (*marzbāns*), who also received their orders directly from the Sasanian monarch. To boost the confidence of his forces, Khosrow improved the quality of their mounts and weapons. He also built defensive walls. One wall erected on the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea was designed to defend his northeastern borders from incursions of nomadic tribes from Central Asia. Another wall at the town of Darband (Derbent) on the western shores of the Caspian was intended to block the attacks by Khazars and Turkic tribes using the Caucasus as a corridor to penetrate the northwestern frontiers of the Iranian state.

See also: *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Alans

The Alans were an Iranian-speaking people who lived as pastoral nomadic groups along the northern shores of the Caspian and Black Seas, in particular the region between the Volga and Don Rivers in present-day southern Russia. The Alans were most probably part of the larger Scythian and Sarmatian nomadic groups, which dominated the Eurasian steppes beginning in the eighth century BCE. The word "Alan" derives from the Old Iranian word *arya*, or "Aryan," and so is related to the word "Iran" (Abaev and Bailey: Alans). A people called the Alani were first mentioned by Roman writers in the first century CE. In these accounts, the Alani are depicted as a bellicose and pugnacious people with an exceptional talent for breeding horses. The Alani are also mentioned in the context of a nomadic invasion of the Parthian Empire in 72 CE. They swept through Parthian territory from the northeast and reached Media in present-day western Iran, capturing the royal harem of the ruling Arsacid monarch, Vologeses I (Valakhsh I). From Media, they attacked Armenia and defeated the armies of Tiridates, who was nearly captured. The Parthians and Armenians were so alarmed by the devastation wrought by these nomadic invaders that they appealed to Rome for urgent assistance, but the Romans declined to help (Frye: 240). Fortunately for the Parthians and Armenians, the Alani returned to the vast steppes of Eurasia after they had collected a large quantity of booty (Colledge: 52). Sometime between 135 and 136 CE the Alani appeared again, this time as allies of the king of Iberia (present-day eastern Georgia in the southern Caucasus), attacking from the north; plundering Armenia, Atropatene (present-day Iranian Azerbaijan), and Media; and pushing as far west as Cappadocia in Asia Minor. The Arsacid monarch Vologeses III (r. 111/112–147/148 CE) dispatched a large force of 20,000, but they could not defeat the invading Alans. Having failed to contain the Alans, Vologeses may have resorted to bribing them. Once again, the Alans returned home without suffering a defeat (Colledge: 166).

Aside from paying bribes, the Romans, Arsacids, and later the Persian Sasanians neutralized the fierce Alan warriors and horsemen by recruiting them as mercenaries or fighting units in their armies.

The Sasanians were intimately familiar with the Alans, and the "Gate of Alans" is mentioned in the inscription of the Sasanian king Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam near Shiraz in southern Iran. Sometime in the 4th century CE, those Alans who lived along the banks of the Don River broke up into two distinct groups after being attacked and defeated by invading Huns who had crossed the Volga River. Under pressure from the Huns, one group migrated westward, first to Southeast Europe and from there, together with Germanic tribes, to Roman Gaul (i.e., modern-day France, western Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and Luxemburg) and Spain. Branches of the Alans, each ruled by its own king, settled in various parts of Europe and gave their name to the regions they adopted as their new home. Thus, the name of the province of Catalonia in Spain is believed to have derived from the deformation of Goth-Alania or Province of Goths and Alans. The French name "Alain" and the English name "Alan" as well as the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table have also been linked to those Alans who settled in Europe (Abaev and Bailey: Alans). The second branch of the Alans settled in the northern regions of the Caucasus on the banks of the Kuban River in present-day southern Russia. In the 10th century CE, as a result of several centuries of activity by Greek and Georgian Christian missionaries, many Alans converted to Christianity, although a minority remained wedded to their pagan beliefs, traditions, and customs.

After the spread of Islam and the formation of Islamic caliphates, the Caucasus region was repeatedly attacked by Muslim armies. In the ninth century CE, the Alans as well as other communities of the Caucasus were impacted by military campaigns organized and carried out by the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad (r. 750–1258 CE). Despite being pressured by Muslims from the south, the Alans maintained their rule over a vast and powerful kingdom, stretching from Daghestan on the western shores of the Caspian Sea to Abkhazia on the southeastern shores of the Black Sea. The anonymous author of the 10th-century Persian geography *Hodud ul-Alam min al-Mashriq ila al-Maghrib* [The Regions of the World from East to West] described Alania as a vast country with 1,000 large rural communities of Christians and pagans who lived both in the mountains and on the plains (Anonymous, *Hodud ul-Alam:* 191). In the 13th and 14th centuries, the vast region extending from Central Asia to Iran, the Caucasus, and Anatolia was devastated by two major invasions, first by the Mongols, who destroyed urban and rural communities, and then by the Turkic world conqueror Timur (Tamerlane). In the Caucasus, Timur's armies dismantled the military and political power of the Alan state, forcing the Alans to split into several groups (Abaev and Bailey: Alans). One group moved west and settled in Hungary. A

second group joined forces with the Mongols and participated in their military operations as far east as China. The third group settled in the central regions of the Caucasus, where they live today.

The Ossetian people of the Caucasus region trace their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural heritage to the ancient Alans. Ossetians are divided linguistically into two groups: Ir and Digor (Frye: 40). The more numerous Ironian speakers, who are called Ir or Ironi, live both in North and South Ossetia, while the Digors live only in the western regions of North Ossetia. The territory of North Ossetia came under Russian rule in 1774, while southern Ossetia was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1801. In 1922, the new Soviet government divided Ossetia into two regions. North Ossetia remained part of Russia, and South Ossetia was established as an autonomous region within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. South Ossetia declared its independence from Georgia after the Russia–Georgia War of 2008. The majority of Ossetians are followers of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church. A minority of Ossetians, however, are Sunni Muslims.

See also: *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire; Scythians

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Alexander of Macedon (the Great)

The Macedonian king and conqueror who defeated and overthrew the Persian Achaemenid dynasty and established a short-lived empire, which stretched from Greece and Egypt to India. Alexander was born in 356 BCE in Pella in the kingdom of Macedonia. His father was

Philip II, who ruled Macedonia from 359 to 336 BCE. Alexander's mother was Olympias, the daughter of Neoptolemus, the ruler of Epirus. In 340 BCE, Philip attacked Perinthos in northern Greece with the goal of establishing himself as the master of the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits. Alarmed by Macedonia's aggression, the Athenians sent an embassy to the Persian king, Artaxerxes III, and requested an alliance. With support from Athens, Artaxerxes III sent an army that ejected the Macedonians from Perinthos, but Philip persisted nonetheless. He marched with his army against Greece and defeated the armies of Athens and Thebes in the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, permanently ending the independence of the Greek city-states. Alexander participated in his father's campaign against the Greeks as the head of the Macedonian cavalry. In 337 BCE, Philip organized the League of Corinth and declared his goal conveniently as the liberation of the Greek cities, which remained under Persian rule. In 336, Philip dispatched an army to Asia Minor as the first step toward a full-fledged invasion of the western provinces of the Achaemenid Empire. The planned invasion, however, came to a sudden end when Philip was assassinated in July 336.

Upon Philip's death, Alexander, who was only 20 years old, seized the Macedonian throne. After securing his position in Macedonia and crushing an uprising in Greece, he used his father's well-trained army to attack Asia. In the spring of 334 BCE, Alexander crossed the Hellespont and began his conquest of Asia Minor with an army of 37,000 men. The new Persian king, Darius III, failed to prepare his armies for a Macedonian attack. The Macedonians could therefore defeat an Achaemenid force at Granicus River in 334 BCE, where Alexander was almost killed. The Macedonian victory allowed Alexander to capture Sardis in western Asia Minor. The next confrontation between the two sides took place in 333 BCE at Issus in present-day southern Turkey near the city of Iskandarun. Darius III was defeated, and the Persian king's mother, wife, infant son, and two of his daughters "fell into Alexander's hands" (Arrian: 2.12). Alexander used his victory to turn south, seizing Syria, Palestine, and Egypt by the winter of 332. While Alexander was in Syria, "envoys from Darius came with a request for the release of his mother, wife and children" (Arrian: 2.14). They also delivered a letter from Darius to Alexander in which the Persian king appealed for a restoration of alliance and friendship between the Persian Empire and the kingdom of Macedonia. Alexander refused to release the members of the Persian royal family and rejected a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The armies of Darius and Alexander fought for the last time in the Battle of Gaugamela or Arbela in present-day northern Iraq on October 1, 331 BCE. The Achaemenid army was defeated after Darius

III fled the battlefield. The Persian king sought temporary refuge in Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan), which served as the summer capital of the Achaemenid dynasty. After his victory at Arbela, Alexander moved south and seized Babylon. From Babylon, he marched against the Achaemenid winter capital of Susa, where he captured the large Persian treasury. Alexander's next target was the province of Parsa (Persis), the birthplace of the Achaemenid dynasty and home to the royal palace complex of Persepolis and Cyrus's capital, Pasargadae. As he marched toward Persis, Alexander split his forces. His general, Parmenio, "was given orders to proceed by the main road into Persia with the Thessalian cavalry, the allied and mercenary contingents, all the other more heavily armed units, and the baggage trains" (Arrian: 3.18; Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.3.16). Alexander himself, at the head of a force consisting of the Macedonian infantry, the Companion cavalry, the Agrianes, the archers, and advanced scouts, set off with all speed through the hills (Arrian: 3.18; Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.3.17). At this juncture, the Persian satrap of Parsa, Ariobarzanes, tried to slow down Alexander's march to Persepolis on a mountainous track called the Persian Gate (Arrian: 3.18.2). At the Persian Gate northeast of modern Yasuj, the capital of the Iranian province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, the Macedonian units under the command of Alexander "encountered Ariobarzanes," who "had already built defenses across the pass" and with his force "had taken up a position there to prevent Alexander from getting through" (Arrian: 3.18.2; Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.3.17–18). Confident of his ability to score an easy victory, Alexander attacked Ariobarzanes and his small army with a force of 10,000 men (Arrian: 3.18.1). Holding a commanding position over the plain, the Persians fought back and defeated the Macedonian army without any loss. The Macedonians "suffered severely from missiles hurled or catapulted from above," and Alexander was forced to retreat (Arrian: 3.18.3), suffering "agonies, as much of shame as despondency, at his foolhardiness in stranding his army in the gorge" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.3.21). Eventually, prisoners at the Macedonian camp who knew the various passes in the region led Alexander and his commanders under the cover of dark through roundabouts to the rear of the Persian position. At dawn Alexander attacked the small Persian force under the command of Ariobarzanes, while the Macedonian general Craterus attacked the gate from the front. The Persian defenders were mostly killed. According to Arrian (Arrian: 3.18.3–8; 3.23.7), Ariobarzanes escaped the battle with a group of his men, but according to Curtius he managed to break out of the Macedonian siege and reached Persepolis but was barred by its garrison, so he returned and fought to the end (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.4.33).

Alexander seized Persepolis and its treasury. In a drunken eruption of rage and revenge, Alexander burned and destroyed the palace complex, which had been built by Darius I and his successors (Arrian: 3.19). While in Persis (Parsa) in southern Iran, Alexander also captured the treasury of Pasargadae, the capital of Cyrus II the Great (Arrian: 3.19). From Parsa, Alexander moved against Ecbatana, the summer capital of the Achaemenid kings in western Iran, with the intention of capturing Darius and the Persian generals who accompanied him. By the time Alexander arrived in Ecbatana, however, Darius and his entourage had already left the city for eastern Iran. They probably planned to connect with loyal units and commanders in the eastern provinces of the empire, particularly Bactria and Sogdiana, and then raise an army and strike back. It is not certain what happened at this point. Some historians maintain that Darius refused to flee any farther, forcing his loyal commanders to imprison him in a wagon. Regardless, by the time Alexander caught up with Darius III, the Achaemenid king was already dead, most probably murdered by the Persian nobles who were fleeing with him. With the death of Darius III in the summer of 330 BCE, Achaemenid rule came to an end.

After Media, Alexander's next target was Hyrcania, on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea, and Parthia, a province corresponding with the western region of Iranian Khorasan and the southern regions of present-day Turkmenistan. Alexander crossed the Alborz mountain range; punished the Mardi tribe, which resided in the eastern Alborz; and entered Hyrcania. In Hyrcania, several high-ranking Persian commanders who had served in Darius's army, including the satrap of Hyrcania and Parthia, Phrataphernes, arrived in Alexander's camp and surrendered (Arrian: 3.23). Alexander continued with his march, seizing the chief Hyrcanian town of Zadracarta, "the site of the royal palace," which has been identified by some scholars as modern-day Gorgan (Arrian: 3.23–3.26). From Hyrcania, Alexander marched to Parthia and then to Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan. It has been claimed that while in Aria, Alexander founded a new city called Alexandria of the Arians (modern-day Herat). From Aria, he marched to Drangiana in eastern Iran. From Phrada, Alexander pressed on during the winter of 330–329 BCE up the valley of the Helmand River, through Arachosia (modern-day Qandahar), and over the mountains past the site of modern-day Kabul. His next target was Bessus, the governor of Bactria, who had raised an army against the Macedonian invaders. After the death of Darius III, Bessus had proclaimed himself king of Asia, "wearing the royal mantle and the cap with the point erect, in royal fashion," and adopted the royal title "Artaxerxes" (Arrian: 3.25).

Late-Hellenistic marble bust of Alexander of Macedon (the Great) from the Archaeological Museum of Pella, Greece. Alexander's invasion of the Persian Empire in 334 BCE resulted in the collapse of the Achaemenid dynasty, but Alexander's own empire disintegrated shortly after the death of the Macedonian conqueror in 323 BCE. (Jupiterimages)

When Alexander marched against Bactria, Bessus did his best to slow Alexander's advance by laying waste to the country south of the Oxus River. The burning of crops denied Alexander and his army any access to food and fodder. Despite Bessus's best efforts, however, Alexander continued his march, forcing Bessus to cross the Oxus and seek refuge in Sogdiana, the region north of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and south of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya). Aside from his own troops, Bessus also commanded fighting units from the armies of two Iranian generals, Spitaman (Spitamanes) and Oxyartes, as well as cavalry units from Sogdiana and the Dahae nomadic units. Before he could engage the Macedonians, however, Bessus was arrested by two of his subordinates, Spitaman and Dataphernes, who contacted

Alexander and negotiated the process of handing over the ill-fated governor to the Macedonian conqueror (Arrian: 3.30). According to Arrian, when Alexander saw Bessus, he asked the former Bactrian governor why he had treated Darius III, "his king, kinsman, and benefactor, so shamefully, first seizing him, then hurrying him off in chains, and finally murdering him" (Arrian: 3.30). Bessus reportedly responded that his treatment of Darius "was not his alone: everyone close to Darius at that time had shared in it," and their objective was simply "to win Alexander's favor and so save their lives" (Arrian: 3.30). Alexander refused to spare Bessus's life. Bessus's "nose and the tips of his ears" were cut off before he was executed (Arrian: 4.7).

The execution of Bessus did not quash the anti-Macedonian sentiments, which resurfaced through the rebellion of the Sogdian general, Spitaman. In 329 BCE, Spitaman led a popular revolt against Alexander in Bactria and Sogdiana and laid siege to Maracanda (Samarqand). Alexander sent an army under the command of his general, Pharnuches, to suppress the rebellion, but Spitaman inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Macedonian force, which was dispersed after suffering heavy losses. When Alexander hurried to Maracanda to relieve the city, he discovered that Spitaman had already departed for Bactria. In 328 BCE Spitaman attacked Bactria, but the governor of the province, Artabazus, who had sworn loyalty to Alexander, managed to repulse him. Spitaman was finally defeated by Alexander's general, Coenus. After this defeat Spitaman was betrayed by his Scythian allies, who murdered him and sent his head to Alexander. After seizing Maracanda, Alexander advanced to Cyropolis (the City of Cyrus), eventually reaching the Jaxartes (Syr Darya), the northeastern boundary of the Persian Empire. He fought several battles against the Scythian tribes, and it is claimed that he built a city, Alexandria Eschate (Alexandria the Farthest), on the site of modern-day Khojand in northern Tajikistan. Alexander remained in Sogdiana until the end of 328 BCE, defeating Oxyartes and those who continued to fight his army.

Having pacified Sogdiana and Bactria, Alexander marched south toward India. In 326 he crossed the Indus River and seized Taxila. The ruler of Taxila, Taxiles, cooperated and provided Alexander with elephants and fighting men. In return for his generous support, Alexander promised military assistance for Taxiles in his conflict with Porus (Paurava), a rival and the ruler of another Indian kingdom in Punjab. In sharp contrast to Taxiles, Porus refused to submit to Alexander. When the two armies joined in battle, Porus was defeated. Porus's son was killed on the battlefield, and Porus himself was wounded and captured by the Macedonians. Porus survived his defeat and was appointed the satrap (governor) of his own kingdom.

After two years of fighting in India, Alexander's exhausted troops mutinied and demanded an end to military operations. Alexander had no other choice but to turn back. In 325 BCE he began to march westward through the harsh and waterless region of Gedrosia (modern-day Baluchistan). This march proved disastrous. Thousands of men, women, and children perished as they traveled through the desert. After a long and arduous journey, Alexander finally arrived in Susa in southwestern Iran in the spring of 324. Back in the former winter capital of the Persian Empire, he organized a mass wedding. Alexander and 80 of his generals married Iranian wives. Alexander himself married Barsine, "Darius' eldest daughter," and Parysatis, the youngest daughter of Ochus (Artaxerxes III, who ruled from 359 to 338 BCE), thus linking himself with both branches of the Persian Achaemenid royal family (Arrian: 7.4). In this ceremony, the Macedonian general Seleucus married Apame (Apama), the daughter of the Sogdian commander Spitaman who had fought Alexander. The Seleucid dynasty was born from the marriage between the Iranian Sogdian Apame and the Macedonian Seleucus. The "marriage ceremonies were in the Persian fashion: chairs were set for the bridegrooms in order of precedence, and when healths had been drunk the brides entered and sat down by their bridegrooms, who took them by the hand and kissed them" (Arrian: 7.5). After the end of the ceremony, "all the men took their wives home, and for every one of them Alexander provided a dowry" (Arrian: 7.5). As with his policy of recruiting the members of the Persian nobility in his royal cavalry bodyguard, Alexander hoped that these marriages would create unity between the Macedonians and Iranians. His attempts to include these Persians in the power structure of the newly emerging empire, however, only ignited the resentment of his Macedonian generals, who viewed such policies as a threat to their privileged position. Alexander died on June 13, 323 BCE, after a long and prolonged banquet and drinking bout. At the time of his death, he was 33 years old and had ruled for 12 years and eight months. His body was eventually transported to Egypt by one of his generals, Ptolemy, who placed the body of the deceased king in a golden coffin in Alexandria. Alexander had not designated his successor. The empire he had created disintegrated shortly after his death as his generals fought to establish independent kingdoms of their own.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius III; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Apame/Apama; Seleucus I Nicator; *Peoples:* Seleucids

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Ariobarzanes

A Persian commander in the army of Darius III (r. 336–330 BCE), the last Achaemenid king. Ariobarzanes was present at the Battle of Gaugamela (Arbela), which was fought between Darius III and Alexander the Macedon in present-day northern Iraq in October 331 BCE. As the governor (satrap) of Parsa (Persis) in present-day southern Iran, Ariobarzanes fought Alexander in January 330 BCE in the Battle of the Persian Gates in a last-ditch effort to prevent the invading Macedonians from reaching the Achaemenid ceremonial capital of Persepolis.

In the Battle of Gaugamela, Ariobarzanes served as the co-commander of a unit of Persian, Mardian, and Sogdian forces, sharing this command with Oronotobates (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 4.12.7). The "supreme command" of the unit "rested with Orsines," who was descended from one of the Persian officers who had supported Darius I when he seized the Persian throne in 522 BCE and "also traced his line back to the renowned King Cyrus" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 4.12.8). According to Arrian, in the Battle of Gaugamela, Ariobarzanes and Oronotobates were commanders of the "contingents from the neighborhood of the Persian Gulf" (Arrian: 3.8.5). After he was defeated, Darius III fled to Hagmatana/Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) accompanied by a group of his generals. With their king in flight and in the absence of any centralized authority that could organize an empire-wide resistance, each governor became responsible for the defense and security of his own province. Left to their own means and without any support from the Achaemenid central government, many Persian satraps surrendered to Alexander and accepted his suzerainty. Initially, Alexander accepted the surrender of these satraps and preserved them in their posts.

Meanwhile, after his victory at Gaugamela, Alexander moved south and seized Babylon and Susa. He then marched against the province of Parsa (Persis) and Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the

Achaemenid Empire. Alexander split his forces. His general, Parmenio, "was given orders to proceed by the main road into Persia," while Alexander himself, "at the head of a force consisting of the Macedonian infantry, the Companion cavalry, the Agrianes, the archers, and advanced scouts, set off with all speed through the hills" (Arrian: 3.18.2). The Persian satrap of Parsa (Persis), Ariobarzanes, tried to slow down Alexander's march to Persepolis on a mountainous track called the Persian Gates (Arrian: 3.18.2; Strabo: 15.3.6). According to Arrian, Ariobarzanes fled to the mountains with a band of horsemen (Arrian: 3.18.9).

At the Persian Gates northeast of modern Yasuj, the capital of the present-day Iranian province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, the Macedonian units under the command of Alexander "encountered Ariobarzanes," who "had already built defenses across the pass" and with his force "had taken up a position there to prevent Alexander from getting through" (Arrian: 3.18.2). Curtius claimed that Ariobarzanes had occupied the pass "with 25,000 infantry," while Arrian stated that Ariobarzanes commanded an infantry force of 40,000 supported by 700 cavalrymen (Arrian: 3.18.6). These numbers are not only grossly exaggerated but are also laughable. Such embellished numbers were used as a means of portraying the Achaemenid state as a military giant with unlimited resources and manpower and converting Alexander into a military genius who fought and defeated armies many times larger than the size of his own. If they admitted that a small force of desperate but determined Persians inflicted a humiliating defeat on a much larger Macedonian army led by Alexander, who was forced to retreat, then one could not glamorize the Macedonian victory over a disintegrating polity as a unique moment in human history.

Confident of his ability to score an easy victory against the small Persian force that blocked his path to Persepolis, Alexander attacked Ariobarzanes with a force of 10,000 men (Arrian: 3.18.1). Holding a commanding position over the narrow pass, Ariobarzanes and his small Persian force fought back. The Persians rolled "massive rocks down the mountain slopes" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.3.16). "Stones, shot from slings, and arrows were also showered" on the Macedonians (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.3.19). The Macedonians "suffered severely from missiles hurled or catapulted from above," and Alexander was forced to retreat (Arrian: 3.18.3). At this critical juncture, a native who knew the various passes in the region led Alexander and his commanders under the cover of darkness through roundabouts to the rear of the Persian position. At dawn Alexander attacked the Persian force under the command of Ariobarzanes, while his general, Craterus, assaulted the gate from the front. Surrounded, the Persians put up "a

memorable fight. … Unarmed men grappled with men who were armed, dragging them to the ground by virtue of their bodily weight and stabbing many with their own weapons" (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.4.31–2; Arrian: 3.18.3–8). The Persian defenders were mostly killed. According to Curtius, Ariobarzanes "broke through the center of the Macedonian line" and "hurried to occupy the regional capital, the city of Persepolis," but he was shut out from there by the city garrison (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.4.33–34). Left with no other alternative, Ariobarzanes renewed the battle and died fighting together with all those who had fled with him (Quintus Curtius Rufus: 5.4.34). The valor, audacity, selflessness, and heroism of Ariobarzanes, who sacrificed his life in defense of Persia, has been celebrated by numerous Iranian writers of the 20th century. Today, a statue of the Persian commander welcomes visitors to the city of Yasuj, the capital of the province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, located in the Zagros Mountains of southwestern Iran.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Persepolis; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius III; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great)

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Arsacid Army

Originally a Scythian group from Central Asia, the Arsacids, known in the Greek and Roman accounts as the Parthians, founded a powerful

empire that at its zenith ruled a vast territory stretching from Central Asia to Syria and from Armenia to the Persian Gulf. The armies of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) were some of the most accomplished, efficient, and feared of all military forces of antiquity. Raised from a young age to the arts of horsemanship and archery, Parthian soldiers enjoyed a reputation that still echoes today in the modern Persian term *pahlavan*, meaning "champion" or "warrior" (Shahbazi: "Army I"). Parthian military tactics and sharpshooting are renowned in military history. Because of the geographical location of their empire, the Parthians were forced to fight frequently against various nomadic groups invading from Central Asia as well as against Roman legions attacking through Armenia or Mesopotamia. To neutralize these threats to the security of their empire, the Parthians were forced to develop a highly flexible and elastic military force that could employ exceptional mobility and effectiveness.

Our information about the Arsacid army is extremely scanty. We do not know the exact size, internal organization, and social composition of Arsacid armies. Lack of adequate sources has forced scholars to rely almost exclusively on Roman and Greek accounts, which are characterized by hostility and disdain toward these eastern neighbors of Rome, denouncing the Arsacids as treacherous and arrogant barbarians with strange and repugnant customs and practices. This negative image was manufactured and promoted by the Romans, who were skilled political propagandists against enemies who stymied Rome's expansionist policies. The deep hostility and resentment expressed toward the Arsacids originated from the failure of Rome to subdue these uncanny Iranians who refused to be intimidated and submit to the might of Roman legions and had repeatedly displayed an exceptional talent and brilliance in defeating Roman armies. As Emperor Julian wrote, "tell me why, after a war of more than three hundred years, you Romans have never conquered a small province beyond the Tigris which is still governed by the Parthians? Shall I tell you why? It was the arrows of the Persians that checked you. Ask Antony to give you an account of them, since he was trained for war by you" (Julian: 387).

The Arsacid monarchs ruled a highly decentralized empire. When an Arsacid king had to raise an army, he asked the local kings, vassals, governors, regional magnates, and tribal chiefs under his suzerainty to mobilize their forces, which included their families, dependents, servants, and slaves, and lead them to a designated meeting place. Depending on the movement of enemy forces, the king divided these units into a number of smaller armies, each responsible for confronting the enemy as it entered Parthian territory. The cavalry

constituted the backbone of the Arsacid army. According to Justin, the Arsacids refused to engage their enemy in hand-to-hand combat, and they avoided "close fight" at all costs (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). They always fought "on horseback, sometimes advancing, and sometimes turning back upon their enemies" (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). The Parthians were "armed like the Scythians" from whom they had "descended" (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). A section of the Arsacid cavalry was armed with bows and arrows, while other units, namely the cataphracts, were heavily armed with lance, knife, and bow, with both horse and cavalryman armored and protected by coats of chain mail. When the Arsacid commander Surena (Suren) defeated the Roman army under the command of Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE, his army was composed of 10,000 cavalry. In the confrontation with Mark Antony in 36 BCE, the Arsacid cavalry was estimated at 50,000, with 400 members of the nobility constituting the core of the cavalry forces (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). The Arsacid nobility constituted the highest echelon of the Parthian military forces, which also included their dependents, servants, retainers, serfs, and at times foreign mercenaries. According to Justin, the Arsacids did not have an army composed "wholly of free men," but the majority consisted "of slaves" whom they brought up "with as much care as their children, and [they] teach them with great industry, both riding and shooting" (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). Justin erroneously equated the Parthian nobles known as *āzāt* with "free-men" and the large army of their dependents with "slaves." Arsacid units included infantry divisions as well, but these numbers were small, and their role and impact on the battlefield were negligible.

The Arsacid elite dressed like the Medes, with a garment translucently thin and fluent (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). The Arsacid cavalry wore helmets and breastplates of rawhide or steel, which according to Roman observers blazed like fire under the sun. Their horses were likewise described as wearing plates of bronze and steel (Justin: XLI.2.2–3). Parthian fighters painted their faces and gathered their hair "in a mass upon their foreheads after the Scythian mode" (Plutarch: 1.814). They attacked the enemy with long spears, lances, and pikes or from a distance by shooting extremely swift arrows with their strong bows. To the shock of their enemies, the barbed arrowheads pierced through hard and soft armor, inflicting severe damage on veins and muscles. The Parthian cavalry was known for the unique and exceptional ability of its horsemen to shoot arrows as they fled, an old and extremely difficult technique known as the "Parthian shot."

The Parthian strategy was to fight with patience, astuteness, and minimum hand-to-hand contact with the foe, demoralizing the enemy instead with random unpredictable and shocking moves, such as

appearing and disappearing, hitting and escaping, and retreating and encouraging pursuit but then suddenly turning back and attacking with a shower of arrows. Parthian archers had at their disposal a large number of camels loaded with arrows and standing on the fringes of the battlefield to deliver new supplies of ammunition (Plutarch: 1.815). The Parthians did not use war chariots. Instead of using horns or trumpets to sound the attack, the Parthian armies used hollow drums of animal hide to which they had attached bronze bells. The beating of these drums all at once across different parts of the battlefield produced a most eerie and terrifying sound, which according to Roman sources sounded like the roaring of wild animals accompanied by claps of thunder (Plutarch: 1.814; Justin: XLI.2.2–3). Parthian armies also resorted to psychological warfare as well as negotiations to deceive the enemy and force its leadership to surrender. Even after defeating a formidable foe, they did not make any attempt to continue pursuit at night, preferring to finish the job at dawn the following day (Plutarch: 1.819).

The brilliance of the Parthian cavalry on the battlefield and the defeats they inflicted on Rome at military encounters such as the one at Carrhae in 53 BCE forced some Roman writers and historians to admit grudgingly that the Iranian dynasty constituted a formidable adversary worthy of Rome's respect and admiration. For example, the Roman consul and historian Cassius Dio wrote that "They [Parthians] are really formidable in warfare. … The Parthians make no use of a shield, but their forces consist of mounted archers and lancers, mostly in full armor. Their infantry is small, made up of weaker men; but even these are all archers. The land, being for the most part level, is excellent for raising horses and very suitable for riding about on horseback. … [E]ven in the war they lead about whole droves of horses, so that they can use different ones at different times, can ride up suddenly from a distance and also retire to a distance speedily" (Cassius Dio: XL.14–16).

Recognizing the devastation wrought by war and its destructive impact on their economy and population, Parthians displayed a genius for negotiating peace treaties. Contrary to their claims of superiority over the so-called barbarians, Romans who had suffered military defeats at the hands of the Parthian forces also strove to avoid dangerous wars, which only resulted in disgraceful peace treaties. The Parthian armies carried numerous colorful flags and banners onto the battlefield. These were often adorned with the figures of animals, including dragons and lions, but the ancient national emblem of Iran, the jewel-encrusted Derafsh-e Kavyan (Standard of Kaveh) served as their imperial flag (Shahbazi: "Army I").

See also: *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Mithridates I; Mithridates II; Orodes II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Parthian Empire; Arsacids; Primary Documents: Document 21; Document 22; Document 23; Document 29

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Arsacid (Parthian) Empire

The Arsacid dynasty, founded by Arsaces I (Arshak I), created the third major Iranian empire after the Medes and the Persian Achaemenids. Iranian sources on the Arsacid dynasty are scant in the extreme, forcing historians to rely heavily on Roman and Greek sources, which are pronounced in their hostility and disdain toward these proud and powerful eastern neighbors, portraying them as treacherous barbarians engaged in unusual and distasteful customs. Such a negative image was intentionally manufactured and promoted by the Romans, who were masters of producing skillful political propaganda against an enemy who had successfully fought Rome's expansionist policies.

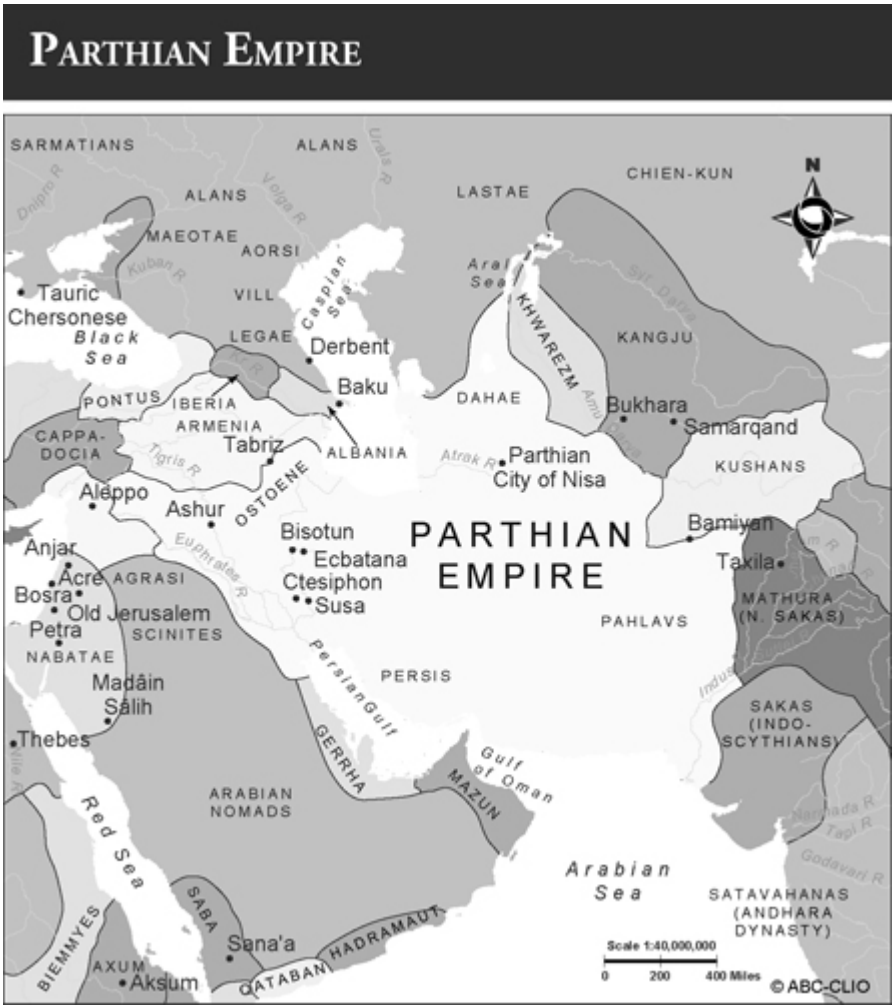
The exact origins of the Arsacid dynasty remain a mystery. The founder of the Arsacid dynasty was Arsaces I (Arshak I), a leader of the Parni or Aparni, a Scythian or Saka group within the Dahae

confederacy (Strabo: 11.9.2). In 247 BCE, Arsaces I crowned himself king at Asaac (Asaak). The location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). In 238 BCE, Arsaces invaded Parthia and defeated and killed its ruler, Andragoras (Justin: XLI.4.8–9). Not long after, Arsaces seized Hyrcania (modern-day Gorgan) on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea (Justin: XLI.4.8–9). Using Parthia and Hyrcania as their base, the Arsacids expanded their territory to the region south of the Alborz mountain range during the reign of Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE). The younger brother and successor of Phraates I, Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), defeated the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. He then moved west and seized Media and Mesopotamia. Arsacid forces also defeated the armies of Demetrius II (r. 145–141 BCE) and captured the Seleucid monarch who was sent as a prisoner to Mithridates I in Hyrcania. During the reign of Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE), the Arsacids finally ended Seleucid rule in Iran after defeating and killing Antiochus VII (r. 138–129 BCE).

The first capital of the Parthian dynasty was the city of Nisa near Ashgabat in present-day Turkmenistan. As the Arsacids expanded their territory westward, the seat of power shifted first to Hecatompylos (Sad Darvazeh, or City of a Hundred Gates) near Shahr-e Qumis, near the city of Damghan in the northern Iranian province of Semnan, and then to the city of Seleucia-on-Tigris and Ctesiphon near today's Baghdad in southern Iraq. Hamedan (ancient Hagmatana or Ecbatana) in western Iran served as the royal seat of the Arsacid kings but only during the summer. During the reigns of the kings Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), Phraates II (r. 139/138–128 BCE), and Mithridates II (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), the Arsacid state emerged as a world power. Situated between Central Asia and India to the east and the Roman Republic (later the Roman Empire) to the west, the Parthian Arsacid Empire controlled one of the most important trade links, which connected the economies of East and South Asia to those of the Near East, North Africa, and Europe. Precious commodities such as Chinese-made silk traveled through Parthian territory before reaching the western markets of Byzantium and Rome. The power and advanced civilization of the Arsacid Empire impressed foreign visitors, including the Chinese traveler Zhang Qian, who reported that the Parthians ruled "several hundred cities of various sizes," each enclosed by high walls (Sima Qian: 235). According to the Chinese author Sima Qian, farmers in the Arsacid domains grew rice, wheat, and grapes for wine, and their merchants traveled far to trade with distant countries (Sima Qian: 235). The territory of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire at the

time of the traveler Zhang Qian extended to a hot and humid land he called Tiaozhi or T'iao-chih (i.e., Babylonia), where people lived "by cultivating the fields and planting rice" and where birds of enormous size laid eggs as large as pots (Sima Qian: 235). In Tiaozhi, all the local chiefs obeyed "the ruler of Anxi" or the king of Parthia, who regarded "them as his vassals" (Sima Qian: 235).

The Arsacid (Parthian) Empire was under constant pressure in the east from the nomadic groups bursting out of Central Asia and in the west from an aggressive and expansionist Rome. There were two major sources of conflict between Rome and Parthia: the first was Armenia, and the second was Mesopotamia. In 53 BCE, during the reign of the Arsacid king Orodes II, who ruled from 58/57 to 38 BCE, the Roman general Crassus invaded Mesopotamia, but the Arsacid commander, Surena, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Roman forces at Carrhae near present-day Harran in southeastern Turkey. Wars between Rome and the Parthians continued, with Rome frequently acting as the aggressor. Strabo wrote that the Parthians at first had hoped for peace with the Romans but instead were forced to defend themselves, first against Crassus in the Battle of Carrhae and then against the Roman general Mark Antony. After long negotiations with the emperor Augustus, the Parthians returned the Roman standards, which they had captured from Crassus and Antony. Despite these peaceful gestures, the relationship between the two empires remained tense. From 113 to 117 CE, the Roman emperor Trajan tried to bring the Parthians to their knees by attacking Armenia and Mesopotamia, including Adiabene in present-day northern Iraq. Trajan sacked the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon in 116, reaching the mouth of the Persian Gulf. His successor, Hadrian, withdrew from much of the territory that Trajan had seized in Mesopotamia, recognizing that his predecessor's conquests could not be sustained. Once again, in 161 CE the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius responded to a successful campaign by the Arsacid monarch Vologeses IV (Valakhsh IV) (r. 147/148–191/192 CE) by attacking and capturing Ctesiphon. Hostilities once again broke out between the two powers during the reign of Vologeses V (r. 191/192–207/208 CE). In 197 CE, the Romans under Septimius Severus attacked Mesopotamia and sacked and looted the Parthian capital.



The threat from Rome was matched by a new and powerful state to the east, namely the Kushans. The Kushans ruled vast territories in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The Kushan state included what is now Tajikistan, a large part of Uzbekistan, possibly parts of Kyrgyzstan and southern Turkmenistan, almost all of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and parts of northern India. The powerful Kushan king, Kanishka, expanded his empire in Central Asia by invading and occupying the area of present-day western China, including the urban centers on the southern and western rims of the Tarim Basin. This conquest allowed the Kushans to benefit from the lucrative trade on the Silk Road while at the same time establishing direct commercial links with China. Kanishka also established close diplomatic ties with Rome in an attempt to isolate the Parthians. His plan most probably was to divert the flow of precious goods, particularly silk, from Iran to

ports on the Indian Ocean, where ships carrying Chinese, Central Asian, and Indian goods could sail to Rome without any hindrance and intervention from a third party.

Beginning in the second century CE, the Arsacid state entered a long period of decline. Repeated Roman invasions and internecine struggle among various contenders to the throne undermined the power and stability of the empire. But the Arsacid dynasty did not collapse as a result of Roman invasions or dynastic wars. The end of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire came when a vassal of the Arsacid dynasty, Ardashir, the governor of the district of Istakhr in the province of Fars in southern Iran, rebelled. After Ardashir invaded neighboring provinces in southwestern and southeastern Iran, the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV, had no other alternative but to confront his rebellious vassal on the battlefield. When the two armies joined battle in 224 CE, it was Ardashir who emerged triumphant. The Parthian army suffered a humiliating defeat, and Artabanus was killed on the battlefield. The death of Artabanus IV signaled the end of Arsacid rule and the beginning of the Sasanian era.

See also: *Cultures:* Aparni; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Mithridates I; Mithridates II; Orodes II; Phraates I; Phraates II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Army; Primary Documents: Document 21; Document 22; Document 23; Document 29

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Arsacids

The Arsacid, or the Parthian dynasty, was one of the most important royal houses in the history of ancient Iran. The Arsacids created a powerful empire, which at its zenith ruled a vast territory extending from the southern regions of Central Asia to the heartland of the ancient Near East. The origins of the Arsacid dynasty and the events that led to the rise of Arsaces I, the founder of the Parthian state, are shrouded in mystery. The absence of reliable Arsacid sources has forced historians of ancient Iran to rely almost exclusively on the accounts of Greek and Roman writers, who were resolute and unyielding in their hostility and disdain toward the Arsacids, portraying them as "treacherous, bellicose and arrogant barbarians with curious and distasteful customs" (Colledge: 13). Worse, these authors displayed little interest in studying and understanding the political, social, economic, and cultural institutions and practices of the Arsacid state and the highly diverse peoples and communities it contained.

The Roman soldier and historian Ammianus Marcellinus claimed that Arsaces I was "a man of low birth" who had been a "brigand chief during his younger days, but since his ideals gradually changed for the better, by a series of brilliant exploits he rose to greater heights" (*Ammianus Marcellinus:* 23.6.1–5). The Greek author Strabo stated that Arsaces was a Scythian chief who emerged as the leader of the Parni or Aparnians, a branch of the Dahae (Daae) confederacy, a nomadic group who lived along the Ochus (Strabo: 11.9.2). In his account of Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia, the historian Arrian mentions the Dahae as a group living in close proximity to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in Central Asia (Arrian: 3.28).

By 250 BCE, the Parni or the Aparni had established themselves on the shores of the Atrek River. A short time later, perhaps in 247 BCE, Arsaces I was crowned king in Asaac. The exact location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in present-day northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). The rise of Arsaces corresponded with the growing decline of the Seleucid state, which

had ruled Iran since 305 BCE. The incessant military campaigns against the Ptolemaic dynasty centered in Egypt exhausted the Seleucid treasury and diverted the attention of its rulers from the eastern provinces of their empire. The city of Antioch, which served as the capital of the Seleucid kings, was situated on the western borders of the empire and a long way away from Iran and Central Asia.

NOTABLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SITES OF GREATER IRAN DURING THE ARSACID (PARTHIAN) PERIOD

There are numerous archaeological sites dating back to the long reign of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE). Many of these sites are located in Iran. These include Shahr-e Qumis or Hecatompylos (Sad Darvazeh, or City of a Hundred Gates) near Damghan in Semnan province, Dez-e Rashkan in Shahr-e Ray in the Tehran province, Izeh in Khuzestan province, Tang-e Butan in Khuzestan province, Tang-e Sarvak also in Khuzestan province, Kangavar in Kermanshah province, Qaleh-ye Yazdigird in Kermanshah province, Sar-e Pol-e Zahab in Kermanshah province, Bisotun also in Kermanshah province, and Kuh-e Khawjeh in Sistan and Baluchistan province. Many other important sites of the Parthian period are situated outside Iran's borders. These include such important sites as Dura Europos in eastern Syria and Nisa in the Republic of Turkmenistan. It is also important to note that several museums, including the Iran-e Bastan Museum in Tehran, the National Museum of the History of Azerbaijan in Baku, the British Museum in London, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., contain valuable archaeological finds from the Arsacid period, including Parthian coins, that play a central role in helping scholars of ancient Iran to determine the exact dates for the reigns of Arsacid kings.

Sometime between 250 and 239 BCE, two important rebellions erupted against the authority of the Seleucid state. Diodotus, the satrap of Bactria, and Andragoras, the governor of Parthia, proclaimed their independence. In 238 BCE, the Parni under the leadership of Arsaces I took advantage of the chaos in the eastern provinces of the Seleucid state and invaded and conquered Parthia. The ruler of Parthia, Andragoras, was killed, and his small kingdom emerged as the new home and operational base for Arsaces I. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or as those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used when referring to them and their empire. Soon, Arsaces I "made himself master of Hyrcania" (Justin: XLI.4.8–9). The acquisition of Parthia and Hyrcania allowed Arsaces to raise a large army to defend himself against a possible attack from the Seleucids to the west and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom to the east. After the death of Theodotus I, the founder of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, Arsaces I made peace and entered into an alliance with his son, Theodotus II (Justin: XLI.4).

When Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE) invaded eastern Iran to punish the Parthians, Arsaces I scored a victory against the Seleucid monarch, a momentous milestone that the Parthians would observe "with great solemnity as the commencement of their liberty" (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II was forced to return west, Arsaces I used the respite as an opportunity to lay the foundation of the Parthian government, "levy soldiers, fortify castles, and secure the fidelity of his cities" (Justin: XLI.5.1). He built a city called "Dara," which was designed and built in such a way that it did not need a "garrison to defend it" (Justin: XLI.5.1–2).

When Arsaces I died "in a good old age" circa 217 BCE, he was succeeded by his son, Arsaces II (Justin: XLI.5). In 209 BCE, the Seleucid king Antiochus III embarked on his eastern campaign and marched to Iran in order to reimpose his authority over Parthia and Bactria. The Seleucid forces attacked Hecatompylos, or Sad Darvazeh (City of a Hundred Gates), in Shahr-e Qumis near the city of Damghan in present-day northern Iran. Arsaces II fought the Seleucid army, estimated at 100,000 men and 20,000 horses, "with great bravery," but he eventually made a tactical retreat and "made an alliance" with Antiochus (Justin: XLI.5). Despite this setback, the Arsacid dynasty survived. Upon his death, Arsaces II was succeeded by his son, Priapatius, who ruled from 191 to 176 BCE. Beginning in the reign of Phraates I (r. 176–171 BCE), a grandson of Arsaces II, the Arsacid state broke out of northeastern Iran and began to expand its territory into the regions south of the Alborz mountain range. Another grandson of Arsaces II, Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), converted the Arsacid kingdom into a major world power.

See also: *Cultures:* Aparni; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Arsaces II; *Peoples:* Arsacid Army; Seleucids; Primary Documents: Document 21; Document 22; Document 23; Document 29

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Bessus

Bessus was the Persian governor of Bactria (present-day northern Afghanistan) during the reign of the last Persian Achaemenid king, Darius III, who ruled from 336 to 330 BCE. Bessus served as a commander in Darius's army when Alexander the Macedon attacked the Persian Empire. After the defeat of Achaemenid armies in the Battle of Gaugamela (Arbela) in October 331 BCE, Darius fled east. Bessus and several other commanders accompanied Darius on his eastward flight. Somewhere near present-day Damghan in northern Iran, Darius was murdered by Bessus, who fled farther east apparently hoping to reach his home base of Bactria to organize a resistance movement against Alexander. Bessus also proclaimed himself king of Asia, "wearing the royal mantle and the cap with the point erect, in royal fashion," and adopted the royal title "Artaxerxes" (Arrian: 3.25). When Alexander marched against Bactria, Bessus did his best to slow Alexander's advance by laying waste to the country south of the Oxus River. The burning of crops denied Alexander and his armies any access to food and fodder. Despite Bessus's best efforts, however, Alexander continued his march, forcing Bessus to cross the Oxus River and seek refuge in Sogdiana, the region north of the Oxus and south of

the Jaxartes, corresponding with present-day Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. Aside from his own troops, Bessus also commanded fighting units from the armies of Spitamanes (Spitaman) and Oxyartes as well as cavalry from Sogdiana and the Dahae nomadic units. Before he could engage the Macedonians, however, Bessus was arrested by two of his subordinates, Spitamanes and Dataphernes, who contacted Alexander and negotiated the process of handing over the ill-fated governor to the Macedonian conqueror (Arrian: 3.30). According to one account, Spitaman changed his mind and refused to hand Bessus over to the Macedonians. Regardless, Bessus was seized and brought to Alexander, stripped of his clothes, and led away in a dog collar. When Alexander saw Bessus, he asked the former Bactrian governor why he had treated Darius III, "his king, kinsman, and benefactor, so shamefully, first seizing him, then hurrying him off in chains, and finally murdering him" (Arrian: 3.30). Bessus reportedly responded that his treatment of Darius "was not his alone: everyone close to Darius at that time had shared in it," and their objective was simply "to win Alexander's favor and so save their lives" (Arrian: 3.30). Alexander refused to spare Bessus's life. The captive general was first subjected to torture. Alexander ordered Bessus's "nose and the tips of his ears" to be cut off before executing him in front of his own countrymen (Arrian: 4.7).

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius III; *Peoples:* Alexander of Macedon (the Great); Spitaman

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Hephthalites

A nomadic confederation of unknown ethnic and linguistic origins that raided South and Southwest Asia in the fifth century CE, in the process defeating the Persian Sasanian armies in several military confrontations and establishing a large and powerful empire that lasted for more than a century. The Hephthalite Empire was eventually destroyed in a joint military campaign organized by the Western Turk state, based in Central Asia, and the Persian Sasanians.

In the fifth century CE, the southern regions of Central Asia and the eastern provinces of the Persian Sasanian Empire were attacked by

nomadic groups called Hephthalites. The ethnic and linguistic origins of the Hephthalites remain unclear. Initially, many scholars regarded the Hephthalites as a branch of the Hun people who invaded and wreaked havoc on Europe under their leader, Attila the Hun (r. ?–453 CE). The proponents of this theory argued that the Hephthalites were most probably from a Tibetan or Turkic ethnic stock. This theory was reinforced by statements from Byzantine historians such as Procopius. In describing the Hephthalites, he wrote that the Hephthalites were of "the stock of the Huns in fact as well as in name; however, they do not mingle with any of the Huns known to us, for they occupy a land neither adjoining nor even very near to them; but their territory lies immediately to the north of Persia. … For they are not nomads like the other Hunnic peoples, but for a long period have been established in a goodly land. … They are the only ones among the Huns to have white bodies and countenances which are not ugly. It is also true that their manner of living is unlike that of their kinsmen, nor do they live a savage life as they do; but they are ruled by one king, and since they possess a lawful constitution, they observe right and justice in their dealings both with another and with their neighbours, in no degree less than the Romans and Persians" (Procopius: I.iii. 2–7).

In 1959, the Japanese scholar Kazuo Enoki utilized Chinese, Greek, and Persian sources to argue that the Hephthalites were a northeastern Iranian people who had originated from Tokharestan, the region formerly known as Bactria that corresponded with the territory of northern Afghanistan. More recently, several scholars have argued that the Hephthalites should be viewed as a heterogeneous tribal confederation, not as a homogenous ethnic and linguistic group.

Beginning in the fifth century CE, the eastern provinces of the Persian Sasanian Empire were invaded by the Hephthalites. The Sasanian monarch Bahram V (r. 421–439 CE) tried to slow down the Hephthalite invaders by building towers to protect the northeastern provinces of his empire from the new invaders. His successors, particularly Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE), spent much of their time on the throne preventing the Hephthalites from entering the northeastern province of Khorasan. One of Yazdegerd's successors, Peroz (r. 459–484 CE), mobilized his army and fought the Hephthalites several times. In one campaign, he was defeated and captured by the Hephthalites and was forced to pay a substantial ransom for his release. After a second defeat, Peroz was forced to leave his son Kavad as a hostage with the Hephthalites. To avenge the humiliation he had suffered and against the advice of his close advisers, Peroz attacked the Hephthalites again in 484. This time the Sasanian monarch was defeated and killed on the battlefield. The victory over the Sasanian army and the death of the Persian king forced the Sasanian state to

sue for peace and agree to pay an annual tribute. The Hephthalites began to interfere in the internal affairs of the Sasanian state and manipulate the civil war between the contenders to the throne in order to expand their own influence. For example, Kavad, who had grown up as a hostage among the Hephthalites, sought their assistance when he was deposed in 496 CE. With support from the Hephthalites, he raised an army and regained his throne in 499. In a series of campaigns from 560 to 563, Kavad's son and successor, the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE), defeated the Hephthalites and put an end to their rule. The Persian monarch achieved this victory with significant support and assistance from the Western Turks, who imposed their political and military domination over much of Central Asia. The emperor of the Western Turks, Ishtemi (r. 553–? CE), attacked from the north, capturing Chach (present-day Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan), crossing the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), and defeating the main Hephthalite army near Bokhara, forcing them to retreat southward. The Sasanian army had, however, occupied much of the southern regions of Central Asia, and the Hephthalites did not have any other alternative but to accept defeat. Squeezed between the Turk Empire to the north and the Persian Sasanians to the south, the Hephthalite state disintegrated. At the height of their power in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the Hephthalites had ruled a vast empire that incorporated the entire territory of present-day southwestern China and much of present-day Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. They also penetrated northern India through Gandhara and defeated the Gupta Empire.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram V; Kavad I; Khosrow I Anushiravan; Peroz

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Iranian Society and Power Structure (Arsacids/ Parthians and Sasanians)

The Zoroastrian holy book the *Avesta* divided ancient Iranian society

into three distinct social classes, namely the priests, the warriors, and the peasant farmers or cultivators. A fourth class, the artisans, is mentioned only once in the *Avesta*. The basic level of social organization in traditional Iranian society was the patrilineal family. A group of settled families engaged in farming and/or animal husbandry constituted a village. Villages deriving their lineage from a common ancestor formed a clan, and several of these clans who traced their origins to a common ancestor constituted a tribe. A tribe was both a genealogical and a spatial reality. Because the structure of the society was based on a patriarchy, each unit was represented by a male individual who was responsible for his social unit. Thus, the family household was led by the head of the household, the village by the village headman, and the tribe by the tribal chief.

The power structure of the Parthian Arsacid state (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) was based on a coalition between the ruling Arsacid royal family and a group of landowning families who ruled various provinces of the empire as local kings. The support of these families, such as the Suren and the Karen, was critical to the internal stability and preservation of the Arsacid monarchy. Each family had a military force independent of the king's army. In 53 BCE, the Suren possessed sufficient political, military, and financial power to mobilize an army of 10,000 cavalrymen to confront and defeat a much larger Roman army under the command of Marcus Licinius Crassus. Some of these families enjoyed special privileges. For example, the head of the Suren family enjoyed the right and privilege of placing the crown on the head of a new Arsacid king at the coronation ceremony. In return for their support for the ruling family, the Arsacids had allowed these families to accumulate enormous power and impose their control over the regions they controlled. Thus, the Karen were centered in Nahavand in western Iran, and the Suren were centered in the eastern province of Sistan. Because of the paucity of reliable sources, our knowledge about the administrative structure of the Arsacid (Parthian) state is extremely limited. Scattered and fragmentary evidence collected from inscriptions and documents unearthed at Nisa in southern Turkmenistan, Susa in southwestern Iran, and Dura Europos in eastern Syria, on the right bank of Euphrates, indicate a highly advanced, decentralized, and flexible administrative structure that varied from one region to the next. The Greek author Strabo wrote that the Arsacid monarchs were appointed by two councils, "one that of kinsmen [the Arsacid nobility], and the other that of wise men and Magi," but he did not elaborate on how the process worked (Strabo: 11.9.3–10). A rock relief at Bisotun near Kermanshah in western Iran shows Mithridates II and four of his high officials. A Greek inscription identifies one of these dignitaries as Gotarzes

(Godarz), satrap of satraps, most probably the same Godarz who raised the flag of rebellion in Babylon and proclaimed himself the king in the last years of Mithridates's reign. Another high official is Kophasates (Kohzad), who is identified as "privy councilor" (Bivar: 41). According to one source, "the post of satrap, a provincial governor in the Achaemenid era, lost much of its old importance in Parthian times," being replaced by "such posts as that of city-governor only, like Khwasak, satrap of Susa in AD 215" (Colledge: 63).

Ardashir, a vassal of the Arsacid dynasty and the governor of Istakhr in the province of Fars, revolted against the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV. Ardashir defeated and killed Artabanus IV on the battlefield in 224 CE. After the establishment of the Sasanian dynasty, the large landowning families, who had enjoyed a great deal of power during the reign of the Arsacids, preserved their power and privileges. Throughout the reign of the Sasanian dynasty, the members of the Suren, Karen, Mehran, etc., occupied important positions of power within the royal court, the central government, and the army. For example, as late as the sixth century Bahram, known as Bahram Chobin (Chubin), from the Mehran family, rose to the rank of commander of the Sasanian army and eventually seized the throne as Bahram VI, proclaiming himself as the king of kings before he was defeated by Khosrow II Parvez, who reestablished Sasanian authority with assistance from the Byzantine state.

The late Sasanian society was divided into four distinct classes, with each class subdivided into several strata: the priests, the warriors, the government administrators, and the fourth estate, which included peasant farmers, artisan farmers, and merchants. The Zoroastrian high priests acted as the ideological allies and defenders of the Sasanian monarchy. However, as clergymen who had to administer to the needs of the masses, the *mobads* also posed as the protectors of the common folks. The army consisted of the cavalry and the infantry, while government officials were divided into secretaries, accountants, scribes, historians, poets, physicians, astrologists, etc. The commoners, or the fourth estate, consisted of merchants, craftsmen, artisans, and peasant farmers. They produced the goods and paid the taxes that sustained the state. The guild tradesmen or craftsmen constituted an important segment of the urban population. Other segments of the urban population included traders and merchants who organized short- and long-distance trade. The peasant farmers constituted the overwhelming majority of the population in the empire. The Iranian states preferred peasants to nomads, because those who cultivated the land were settled, paid taxes, and could be recruited for the army, whereas nomads, who were not settled, disliked and avoided both. As an armed and mobile group, the nomads

were unruly and difficult to bring into line, and the Arsacid and Sasanian Empires both struggled to settle the empire's nomads.

Each social class was under the authority of its own chief and spokesman. Thus, the head of the religious hierarchy was the *mobadan mobad*, the commander of the army was the *Eran spahbad*, the head of the civil administration was the *Eran dibirbad*, and the leader of the fourth class was the *wastrioshan-salar*, *wastriosh-bad*, or *hotakhshbad*. Each class worshipped at its own designated Zoroastrian fire temple: the priests at Adur Farnbag at Karian in Fars in southern Iran; the members of the army, including the members of the Sasanian royal family, at Adur Gushnasp at Shiz in Azerbaijan; and the commoners at Adur Borzen Mihr. At the top of the power pyramid stood the *shahanshah* (king of kings). In theory, the shah enjoyed a divine right to rule; as a consequence, his subjects considered him the sole source of legitimate power. He could therefore demand absolute obedience from them, including complete control over their lives and possessions. According to tradition, he owned all state lands and could dispose of them as he saw fit. Despite this absolute power, the opinion of the Zoroastrian high priests and landowning nobility could strongly influence the shah's decisions and actions. The great god Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) had entrusted his people to the shah's care, and the king was responsible for their safety and protection. During the Sasanian period, the shah was entrusted with the protection, promotion, and expansion of Zoroastrianism, which had been elevated by Ardashir I and his successors as the official religion of the Persian state. Immediately below the king were the members of the Sasanian royal family. Below them were the members of the large landowning feudal families (*vispuran*), including the Karen, Suren, Mehran, etc. As in Parthian times, they constituted the most important segment of the nobility and possessed large estates throughout the empire. These powerful and influential feudal families constituted the military and administrative backbone of the Sasanian monarchy. Their participation in collecting taxes and providing military support for the monarchy, particularly during campaigns against foreign enemies, was crucial to the security and stability of the empire. The members of the lesser nobility (*azatan*) and landed magnates (*dihganan/dihqanan*) also constituted important segments of the Iranian ruling class. Below them were the grandees (*wuzurgan*) and senior civil servants—the great secretaries (*dibiran*), and tax collectors.

See also: *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire; Primary Documents: Document 21; Document 22; Document 23; Document 29; Document 35

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Kushan Empire

The Kushans were a branch of Iranian-speaking people called Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) in Chinese and Tochari in Greek and Latin who established a vast and powerful empire in Central Asia, present-day Afghanistan, and the Indian subcontinent during the first three centuries of the Common Era. The Yüeh-chih moved from Central Asia first to Bactria in the second century BCE. Bactria (Old Persian: Bakhtrish) corresponded to the region south of the Oxus River in present-day northern Afghanistan. The Yüeh-chih divided their newly won territory into five principalities. Nearly a century later, the Kushan prince Kujula Kadphises unified all the branches of Yüeh-chih

under his rule. From Bactria, the Kushans crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and occupied Gandhara. The occupation of Gandhara, southeast of the Hindu Kush Mountains, allowed the Kushans by the middle of the first century CE to extend their power to the Indus River Valley and the city of Taxila. From here, the Kushans moved farther south to the region of the Yamuna (Jamuna) River in the present-day northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where they chose the city of Mathura as their southern capital. Thus, by the beginning of the second century CE the Kushans, along with the Romans, Parthians, and Chinese, were one of the four most powerful states in the world. The Kushan state incorporated present-day Tajikistan, a large part of Uzbekistan, possibly parts of Kyrgyzstan and southern Turkmenistan, almost all of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a portion of eastern Turkestan, and parts of northern India.

In ruling their vast empire, the Kushan kings adopted the administrative structure of the Persian Achaemenid monarchs, which had also been used by the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty in Iran. The empire was divided into provinces, with each province ruled by a governor who was invested with considerable autonomy so he could collect taxes and maintain peace and order. The title of governors under Kushan rule was *ksatrapas* and *mahaksatrapas*, which were the Sanskrit versions of the word "satraps." The Kushans practiced ancestor worship. Claiming that they came from divine origin, the Kushan rulers erected family temples, where the divine ancestors of the ruling dynasty were worshipped. Today, the ruins of many monuments that the Kushan kings erected, such as the religious complex of Sorkh Kotal and the fortress built on the ruins of Ai Khanom, can be found in northern Afghanistan. Several Kushan kings were adherents of Zoroastrianism and Mithraism, while others acted as defenders of Buddhism. The most powerful and influential of all Kushan monarchs, Kanishka I, was a great defender of Buddhism. There is no consensus among scholars about the dates for Kanishka's birth, reign, and death. Recognizing the cultural diversity of the vast empire he ruled, Kanishka adopted a highly tolerant attitude toward non-Buddhist religious communities, including the Zoroastrians, the Hindus, and even those who worshipped Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.

Sorkh Kotal, an archaeological site located in the ancient region of Bactria (present-day northern Afghanistan), contained monumental constructions, temples, and statues from the early Kushan period. The Kushan emperors created one of the largest and most powerful empires of the ancient world, which at its height stretched from Central Asia to India. (De Agostini/Getty Images)

Kanishka expanded his empire in Central Asia by invading and occupying present-day western China, including the important trade centers on the southern and western rims of the Tarim Basin in present-day western China. This conquest allowed the Kushans to benefit from the lucrative trade on the Silk Road while at the same time establishing direct commercial links with China. It also provided Buddhist monks, who were protected by the Kushan king, direct access to the urban centers of Central Asia, where they would build monasteries and spread the teachings of their religion. Kanishka also established close diplomatic ties with Rome in an attempt to isolate the Parthian state in Iran and Mesopotamia. His plan was probably to divert the flow of precious goods, particularly silk from Iran, to ports

on the Indian Ocean where ships carrying Chinese, Central Asian, and Indian goods could sail to Rome without hindrance and intervention from a third party.

In 224 CE, Ardashir, the governor of the district of Istakhr in the province of Fars in southern Iran, overthrew the Arsacid dynasty and founded the Sasanian state. Before defeating the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV, on the battlefield, Ardashir had imposed his authority over the southern, southeastern, and southwestern regions of present-day Iran. Once he had overthrown the Arsacid dynasty, Ardashir seized Media, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Assyria, including the city of Mosul in present-day northern Iraq (Tabari: 2.584). After his campaign in the northwest and west, he switched his focus east and northeast, capturing Sistan, Gorgan, Abar Shahr, Marv, Balkh, and Khwarazm. Recognizing the overwhelming power of the newly established Sasanian state and the determination of its founder to incorporate the lands south of the Oxus River into his empire, the Kushans relented and acknowledged Persian suzerainty (Tabari: 2.584). The inscription of Ardashir's successor, Shapur I, at Naqsh-e Rostam, near Persepolis in southern Iran, states that the Sasanians had imposed their rule over much of Kushan-held territory, including Peshawar in present-day northwestern Pakistan, the royal capital of Kanishka I.

With the submission of the Kushan state, the Sasanians established their rule over much of the territory of present-day Afghanistan and even areas north of the Oxus River, though their control must have been tenuous and through local rulers. The Sasanian ruler, or governor, of Kushan territory received the title of *kushanshah*, or king of Kushan. Branches of the Kushans survived the Sasanian onslaught and continued to rule small kingdoms east of the Indus River until the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century CE, when they were defeated by a new force in Central Asian politics, namely the Hephthalites, a nomadic confederation that also defeated the Sasanians and killed the Persian monarch Peroz on the battlefield in 484 CE.

See also: *Peoples:* Arsacids; Sasanian Empire

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Media, Medes, and the Median Empire

The Medes (Old Persian: Mada) were a branch of Iranian-speaking people who settled in the western regions of present-day Iran sometime during the second millennium BCE. The power and influence of the Medes increased significantly during the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. By the seventh century BCE, the Medes had emerged as the dominant political and military force in western Iran, expanding their territory at the expense of their neighbors to the north, east, and west and in the process establishing a vast and powerful empire by the sixth century BCE.

We do not know with any certainty the exact geographical boundaries of the original territory of Media or the land of the Medes. It is generally believed, however, that the Medes settled in the Hamedan plain, which lies on the eastern slopes of the Zagros mountain range in western Iran. Evidence regarding the origin of the Medes and the internal organization of their society is meager. Archaeological excavations at Median sites in western Iran have so far produced valuable but scanty results. The Assyrian royal inscriptions as well as Babylonian chronicles throw some light on isolated events and encounters between the Medes and their neighbors but do not provide any clear outline of Median history, politics, and social organization. The Greek author Herodotus provides a wealth of information, but it is riddled with mythological accounts, fictitious stories, legendary tales, and conspicuous mistakes.

Figure of a Median soldier from the ancient palace complex of Persepolis in Fars province in southern Iran. The Medes were the first Iranian-speaking group to create a vast empire based in present-day western Iran. (Kick Images/iStockPhoto.com)

The Medes are mentioned for the first time in the royal inscription of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BCE). In his description of the 24th year of his reign, the Assyrian monarch recounts that he descended on the lands of the Medes and neighboring groups, destroyed their cities, killed their warriors, and carted away their possessions. Though the Assyrians penetrated Median territory and plundered Median towns, they do not appear to have retained their hold on the country. The son and successor of Shalmaneser III, Shamsi Adad V (r. 823–811 BCE), attacked and defeated the Medes, devastating and destroying the royal capital of a Median chief as well as 1,200 of his other cities and settlements. The references to Media in Assyrian sources indicate that there were numerous fortified towns ruled by Median chiefs in the western part of present-day Iran. The

Medes are mentioned again in the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III (r. 810–783 BCE), who lists them as one of the tributaries of the Assyrian state. Royal inscriptions from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 BCE) also refer to Media as one of the countries invaded, plundered, destroyed, and burned by his armies. The Assyrian king claims that he annexed Median lands and cities, carrying off booty and forcing the Medes to pay tribute in the form of people, horses, mules, camels, cattle, and sheep. To establish tighter control over these territories, he installed provincial governors responsible for collecting taxes. The Assyrians, however, were not content with collecting booty and imposing direct rule over the Medes. Like other groups who had been conquered by the Assyrians, many Medes were forced to move out of their homes and resettle in Assyria. Another tool of co-option and integration was the recruitment of fighting men from conquered areas into the Assyrian army. This policy undermined the military cohesiveness of the conquered people who lost any potential to resist Assyrian domination. It also allowed the Assyrian state to erase the identity of the non-Assyrian population groups and assimilate their best fighters and units into the Assyrian military hierarchy.

Several of Tiglath-pileser III's successors, particularly Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE), Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE), Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE), and Ashurbanipal (r. 669/668–627 BCE), tried with varying success to impose Assyrian rule over the Medes. Sargon II perhaps tried harder than any other Assyrian monarch to subjugate the Medes. He claimed that he had conquered and brought 34 Median districts within the borders of Assyria and received tribute from them in the form of horses, mules, cattle, and sheep. Sargon also mentioned Medes, who refused to recognize any government or any previous Assyrian king. Some of these Medes resided on the edge of what was then known as Mount Bikni, which has been identified by scholars either as Mount Damavand, 45 miles northeast of Tehran, the capital of Iran, or as the 11,600-foot-high (3,570-meter-high) Mount Alvand near modern-day Hamedan in western Iran.

Median Empire

THE SACK OF NINEVEH IN THE BIBLE

Below is the description from the Old Testament book of Nahum of the Median sack of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 BCE:

The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses.
It is decreed that the city be exiled and carried away.
Its slave girls moan like doves and beat upon their breasts.
Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away.
“Stop! Stop!” they cry, but no one turns back.
Plunder the silver!
Plunder the gold!
The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures!
She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! …
Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!
The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots!
Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears!
Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses—…
Nineveh is in ruins—who will mourn for her?

Source: *Nahum*, 2:6–3:7.

The references to the Medes in Assyrian inscriptions portray a society divided into numerous communities, each led by a chieftain who ruled from his own walled fortress. Assyrian reliefs depict military campaigns organized by Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II

against the Medes and show Median fortresses with towers as well as crenellated battlements. There was, however, no single ruler or central government to control the entire Median territory. The successor of Sargon II, Sennacherib (r. 705–681 BCE), referred on several occasions to the tribute and gifts he exacted from the Medes. The royal inscriptions of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE) indicate that the Medes were fighting among themselves and could not pose an immediate threat to the security of the Assyrian state. The power struggle and squabbling among the Median leadership reached such a point that on one occasion several Median leaders brought gifts to the Assyrian court at Nineveh and sought the protection of the Assyrian king against their own vassals who had challenged their authority. The Assyrian king used the infighting among the Medes to impose his authority over them, exacting tribute and taxes from their chieftains. Despite the fragmentation and infighting that engulfed the Medes, they became sufficiently powerful to force Esarhaddon to conclude vassal treaties. By the time Ashurbanipal (r. 669/668–627 BCE) ascended the Assyrian throne, the Medes had emerged as an independent and powerful state. The Assyrian king mentions his military campaign against a Median chieftain as well as Median cities from which he carried spoils back with him to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Ashurbanipal makes no reference, however, to Median chiefs paying tribute to him or appealing to him to intervene in their internal conflicts.

The death of Ashurbanipal sometime in 627 BCE signaled the beginning of the end for the Assyrian kingdom. Local rulers who had been intimidated by the power of Assyria rose in rebellion and proclaimed their independence. In the midst of this turmoil, the Chaldaean general Nabopolassar (r. 626–605 BCE) emerged as the leader of the Babylonian revolt against Assyrian domination. By 626/625, he had established himself as the independent ruler of Babylon. In 615, Nabopolassar felt sufficiently confident to march against Assyria's first capital city, Ashur in present-day northern Iraq, but he failed to capture it. In 615 BCE, after defeating the Scythians who had occupied and ruled them for nearly three decades, the Medes under the leadership of their king, Huvakhshtra, joined the campaign against Assyria, and in the autumn of that year they crossed the Zagros Mountains and captured Arrapha in present-day northern Iraq. Then in the summer of 614, the Median king Huvakhshtra, who appears as Cyaxares in Herodotus's *Histories*, captured the city of Ashur. The king of Babylonia, who had reached Ashur with his army after it had been seized and destroyed by the Medes, met with Huvakhshtra outside the city, where the two monarchs agreed to a treaty of peace and friendship. In the summer of 612 BCE, the

Babylonians and Medes joined forces and marched against the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, one of the largest cities in the world for nearly half a century and located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in northern Iraq. After a long siege and several fierce battles, the Medes and Babylonians succeeded in conquering the city. The victorious armies plundered and destroyed Nineveh, massacred its population, and carried off into slavery those whose lives they spared. The fall of Nineveh dealt a deathblow to the Assyrian state. Its king, Sin-sharr-ishkun (r. 627–612 BCE), was most probably killed during the final assault, but parts of his army under the command of Ashuruballit (r. 612–609 BCE) escaped to Harran in northern Mesopotamia (present-day southeastern Turkey). Once in Harran, Ashuruballit assumed the throne as king of Assyria. He intended to regroup his forces and look for assistance from the pharaoh of Egypt.

In 610 BCE the Medes and the Babylonians, who were determined to prevent the resurgence of the Assyrian state, again merged their forces and marched against Ashuruballit—who abandoned Harran and retreated to Carchemish on the western bank of the Euphrates River (close to the present-day border between Turkey and Syria). The Assyrians refused to accept defeat, however. In 609 BCE, with military assistance from Egypt, Ashuruballit attacked Harran but failed to recapture the city after the Babylonian army arrived to rescue the besieged garrison. Ashuruballit was most probably killed sometime during this campaign, because his name is never mentioned again. The remnants of the Assyrian army, with support from Egypt, fought desperately to expel the enemy, but they were defeated for the last time in 605 BCE at Carchemish and Hamath in Syria. After several centuries of nearly unchallenged domination, the Neo-Assyrian state ceased to exist, and its territory was divided between Babylonia and Media.

With the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, Media rose as a major power in the Near East. The Medes followed their victory against the Assyrians by annexing the kingdom of Urartu, which was centered on Lake Van in eastern Asia Minor (present-day eastern Turkey). The annexation of Urartu allowed the Medes to emerge as the dominant political and military power in eastern Asia Minor and to become a neighbor of the powerful kingdom of Lydia. From 590 to 585 BCE, the two new neighbors fought several inconclusive battles. In 585 BCE the king of the Medes, Cyaxares, and the ruler of Lydia, Alyattes, finally agreed to cease all hostilities and established the Halys River (Kizil Irmak or Red River in present-day east-central Turkey) as the boundary between their two states. To strengthen this new peace treaty, the son of Cyaxares married a daughter of Alyattes. Shortly afterward, the Median king died and was succeeded by his son, who

appears in Herodotus's *Histories* as Astyages.

The end of the Median Empire came when Astyages was defeated by one of his vassal kings, Cyrus II, the ruler of Anshan. In either 554/553 or 550/549 BCE, a conflict erupted between the Median king Astyages and Cyrus, the ruler of Anshan. It is difficult to state with any certainty whether Cyrus or Astyages initiated the conflict between the Medes and the Persians. According to Herodotus, Astyages summoned Cyrus to his court after he learned that the Persians intended to revolt and free themselves from the Median yoke, but Cyrus responded by sending a threatening message to the Median king that "he would be there a good deal sooner than Astyages liked" (Herodotus: 1.127). The author Polyaenus reported that Cyrus was defeated in three different battles with the Medes. Despite these setbacks, the king of Anshan rallied his men and led them in a fourth battle with the Medes at Pasargadae in present-day southern Iran near the city of Shiraz. The Persians were defeated again and fled the battlefield, but when they saw their wives and children, they were "ashamed of themselves and turned around to face the enemy," routing the Medes, "who were pursuing in disorder," and winning "so great a victory that Cyrus no longer needed another battle against them" (Plyaenus: 7.6.1). Niccolaus of Damascus claimed that Astyages escaped his capital after it fell into the hands of the Persians and was captured in another battle with Cyrus. The Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle of Nabonidus* contradicts the Greek accounts and reports that the king of Media "marched against Cyrus," the ruler of Anshan, but his army "revolted against him" and delivered him "in fetters" to Cyrus, who attacked the Median capital of Ecbatana; seized all the silver, gold, and other valuables of the country as booty; and carried them off back to Anshan (Pritchard: 235). Cyrus treated Astyages with kindness and compassion and allowed him to live at his court until he passed away (Herodotus: 1.130). One source even claimed that Astyages was appointed by Cyrus as the governor (satrap) of Carmania or Kerman in present-day southeastern Iran.

After Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) seized the Persian throne in 522 BCE, Media revolted against him. The revolt was led by a certain Fravartish (Phraortes), who claimed to be Khshathrita from the family of the former Median king Huvakhshtra. The Median army stationed in the province rose in rebellion and switched its allegiance to Fravartish, who proclaimed himself the king of Media. It seems that the revolt in Media enjoyed popular support in Armenia, Parthia, and Hyrcania. Because the Persian and Median units under Darius were small, the king sent an army under the command of his trusted friend Vidarna to suppress the uprising. Vidarna defeated the rebel army in the first battle, but this victory did not put an end to the rebellion.

The Persian king then marched with his army to Media while sending another army under the command of an Armenian commander, Dadarshish, to Armenia to quell the rebellion there. After three inconclusive battles with the Armenian rebels, Darius dispatched another commander, Vaumisa, who had to fight two more battles before the Armenian rebels were fully pacified. Darius himself also marched north to Media, where he fought and defeated Faravartish (Phraortes), who fled to Rhagae (modern-day Ray south of modern Tehran). An army was sent to capture the rebel leader. Fravartish was seized and sent back to Darius. Fravartish was tortured and imprisoned at the royal palace before he was impaled at the former Median capital, Hagmatana (Ecbatana). His closest followers and supporters were flayed, and their hides were stuffed with straw and hung out for everyone to see (Kent: 122–124). After consolidating his power, Darius selected Ecbatana as his summer residence and the home of the royal mint.

After he was defeated by Alexander the Macedon in 331 BCE, the last Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, fled to Media and sought refuge in Ecbatana. In pursuing the Persian king, Alexander marched to Media, seized Ecbatana, and plundered the imperial treasury. After the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire, a part of Media emerged as "Atropatian Media [present-day Iranian Azerbaijan], which received its name from the commander Atropates, who preserved also this country, which was a part of Greater Media, from becoming subject to the Macedonians" (Strabo: 11.13.1). After Atropates was "proclaimed king, he organized this country into a separate state by itself, and his succession of descendants" was preserved down to the Parthian period, with his successors marrying "with the kings of the Armenians and Syrians [Seleucids] and in later times, with the kings of the Parthians" (Strabo: 11.13.1).

After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE and the division of his short-lived empire among his commanders, Media became part of the Seleucid Empire. Ecbatana was plundered on several occasions by the new rulers of Iran, including Seleucus I Nicator (r. 312–281 BCE), who followed the model set by Alexander and looted the city's gold and silver. During the reign of the Seleucid dynasty, Ecbatana continued to serve as an important political and administrative center as well as the home of the royal mint. It was from Media that the Seleucids ruled the eastern provinces of their empire. Seleucus I appointed his son Antiochus (the future Antiochus I) as the ruler of the eastern provinces of the Seleucid kingdom. Antiochus was based in Media (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXI.19.20).

The Arsacids, who defeated the Seleucids and pushed them out of Iran, captured Media during the reign of Mithridates I (r. 171–

139/138 BCE) in 148 or 147 BCE. Following the tradition set by the Achaemenid kings, the Arsacid monarchs continued to use Ecbatana "as a royal residence" and their summer capital, "while the winter capital remained at Seleucia on Tigris near Babylon" (Strabo: 11.13.1–2). The exact geographical boundaries of Media during the reign of the Arsacid dynasty is not clear. The Greek geographer Strabo (64 BCE–21 CE), a contemporary of the Arsacids of Iran, wrote that Media was "divided into two parts"; one part of it was called "Greater Media, of which the metropolis" was "Ecbatana, a large city containing the royal residence of the Median empire" (Strabo: 11.13.1). According to Strabo, most of Media was considered as a "high and cold" country, and such also were the mountains that were situated "above Ecbatana and those in the neighborhood of Rhagae (modern-day Tehran) and the Caspian Gates, and in general the northerly regions extending thence to Matiane and Armenia; but the regions below the Caspian Gates, consisting of low-lying lands and hollows," was "very fertile and productive of everything but the olive" (Strabo: 11.13.7). These low lands of Media provided "exceptionally good 'horse-pasturing country' … and in the time of the Persians it is said that fifty thousand mares were pastured in it and that these herds belonged to the kings" (Strabo: 11.13.7). The Greeks also called the grass that made the best food for horses by the special name "Medie" (Strabo: 11.13.7).

In 224 CE, Ardashir, the ruler of the district of Istakhr in southern Iran and a vassal of the Arsacids, defeated the last Arsacid (Parthian) king, Artabanus IV, and established the Sasanian dynasty. Ecbatana remained under Arsacid control until 226, when it was seized by Ardashir. It is not clear whether the Sasanian kings followed the Achaemenids and the Arsacids by using Ecbatana as their summer capital. In 642 after the Sasanians were defeated in the Battle of Nahavand, Ecbatana was captured by Arab Muslims.

As for the impact of Median customs and traditions, Strabo wrote that the Medes had contributed significantly to the enrichment of Armenian and Persian cultures: "the Median stole" (the royal tiara, which was high and erect and encircled with a diadem) and the "zeal for archery and horsemanship, and the court they pay to their kings, and their ornaments, and the divine reverence paid by subjects to kings, came to the Persians by the Medes" (Strabo: 11.13.7–9). The Persians also adopted Median fashion and attire, wearing "feminine robes" and covering "their bodies all over with clothes" (Strabo: 11.13.10).

EXCAVATIONS AT MEDIAN SITES

The evidence on the origins of the Medes and the internal organization of their

society are meager. Archaeological excavations at the Median sites of Baba Jan Tepe, Godin Tepe, and Tepe Nush-i Jan in the Hamedan-Malayer-Kangavar triangle (also known as the Median Triangle) in western Iran have so far produced valuable but scanty results. Baba Jan Tepe, 60 miles southwest of Hamedan, was excavated in 1966 and for several seasons after by Clare L. Goff. Godin Tepe, located 30 miles southwest of Hamedan on the road to Kangavar, was excavated by T. Cuyler Young of the Royal Ontario Museum between 1965 and 1973, and Nush-i Jan Tepe, located 40 miles south of Hamedan between Malayer and Kangavar, was excavated by David Stronach on behalf of the British Institute of Persian Studies between 1967 and 1977.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; *K&Q, Median:* Astyages; Cyaxares/Huvakhshtra; Deioces; Phraortes; Primary Documents: Document 4; Document 5

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Parthian Stations

Parthian Stations is a short account of the overland trade route between the Levant and India in the first century BCE. The author of the text, written in Greek, is Isidore (Isidorus) of Charax. We know very little about him. He most probably lived during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus, knew both Greek and Aramaic, and was identified with the town of Charax in present-day southern Iraq. The text of *Parthian Stations* offers a brief description of the towns and stations situated on the main military and trade route crossing the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) from west to east. The route began in the west at Zeugma on the bank of the Euphrates River in present-day southern Turkey, which marked the beginning of Parthian territory. It then moved eastward through 19 regions, first along the Euphrates to Seleucia Tigris in present-day southern Iraq, then in a northeasterly direction toward Hagmatana or Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) in Media in western Iran, and then to Rhagae (Ray) south of modern Tehran and the Caspian Gates to Nisa, the first capital of the Arsacid state in the present-day Republic of Turkmenistan. From there the route continued through the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan, turning south to Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan, from there to Sistan in eastern Iran, and finally ending in “White India,” or Arachosia (present-day Qandahar), in southern Afghanistan, where, as Isidore of Charax notes in *Parthian Stations*, “as far as this place the land is under the rule of Parthians” (Isidore of Charax: 9). The regions mentioned in the text are: (1) Mesopotamia and Babylonia, (2) Apolloniatis, (3) Chalonitis, (4) Media, (5) Cambadena, (6) Upper Media, (7) Media Rhagiana, (8) Charena, (9) Comisena, (10) Hyrcania, (11) Astauena, (12) Parthyena, (13) Apauarticena, (14) Margiana, (15) Aria, (16) Anaua, (17) Zarangiana, (18) Sacastana, and (19) Arachosia. The author provides his readers with the names of each province as well as the names of supply stations and the exact distances between them. The description of the provinces and stations in the western regions of the Parthian

Empire are more detailed, while the accounts of the eastern regions are brief in the extreme and lack the names of stations and the precise distances between them. One of the most interesting details of the text is the reference to several cities in the northeastern and eastern regions of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire. The first of these is Asaac, in which the first Parthian monarch, Arsaces (Arshak), was proclaimed king and where a temple stood, complete with its everlasting fire. There is no information on the exact location of this important city, and archaeologists have not been able to identify the site, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). Another city mentioned is Parthaunisa or Parthian Nisa, the city where the royal tombs of the Parthian monarchs were located. Finally, Isidore of Charax mentions the cities of Sacastana (the land of Sakas), including Barda, Min, Palacenti, and Sigal, where the royal residence of the Sakas was located. "Sakas" was a generic word that referred to northern Iranian tribes of Eurasian steppes, branches of which had pushed southward, settling in Sistan in present-day eastern Iran. As with the Parthian city of Asaac, the exact location of Sigal remains a mystery.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Nisa; *K&Q, Arsacid/Parthian:* Arsaces I; Mithridates I; Mithridates II; *Peoples:* Arsacids; Primary Documents: Document 25

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Royal Road

The empires of pre-Islamic Iran dedicated a great deal of effort and investment in maintaining an efficient transportation system. Roads and sea and river routes allowed armies to conquer but also facilitated trade and commerce, which generated revenue and prosperity. Also known as the King's Road, the Royal Road was one of the most important communication links during the reign of the Persian

Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE). The Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486) established the Royal Road during his reign. The Royal Road connected the Persian winter capital of Susa (present-day Shush) in southwestern Iran to the city of Sardis, the former capital of the kingdom of Lydia, in western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The distance from Susa to Sardis along this highway covered some 1,678 miles (2,700 kilometers). Persian mounted couriers traveled from Susa to Sardis in 7 days, while it took 90 days for ordinary travelers to complete the journey from beginning to end. Dotting the highway were 111 post-stations, each with relays of fresh horses for the royal messengers. Inns to accommodate overnight stays were also built up at intervals along the highway. Couriers used the Royal Road to carry news and information from various provinces of the empire to the capital. The Greek author Herodotus wrote that "no mortal thing travels faster than these Persian couriers. The whole idea is a Persian invention, and works like this: riders are stationed along the road, equal in number to the number of days the journey takes—a man and horse for each day. Nothing stops these couriers from covering their allotted stage in the quickest possible time—neither snow, rain, heat, nor darkness" (Herodotus: 8.98).

When first setting out, travelers followed a route well known even today. They left Susa and traveled first to Babylon, in present-day southern Iraq south of the city of Baghdad, and from Babylon to Nineveh, the former capital of the Assyrian Empire in present-day northern Iraq. Although there is general agreement among historians and archaeologists regarding the course of the road from Susa to Nineveh, no consensus exists regarding its course once it reached Asia Minor. Some scholars maintain that the road moved north to Melitene (modern-day Malatya) in southeastern Turkey and then ran to Caesarea Mazaca (present-day Kayseri) in Asia Minor and from there to Pteria in Cappadocia. It crossed the Halys River (Kizilirmak or Red River) in eastern Turkey and ran westward to Ancyra (modern-day Ankara) and Gordium in Phrygia in west-central Asia Minor, eventually reaching Sardis and the Aegean coast. Other writers propose a slightly different route that ran from Melitene to Sebasteia (modern-day Sivas in central Turkey) and then moved west, crossing the Halys River and Cappadocia to Phrygia and running from there to Sardis. A third group argues that leaving northern Iraq, the road moved directly west to Tarsus (present-day Adana-Mersin) in southern Asia Minor and from there ran north through the Cilician Gates (Gülek Pass) in the Taurus mountain range of southern Turkey to Caesarea Mazaca (present-day Kayseri). This southern route probably crossed the Euphrates near Zeugma in close proximity to the present-day city of Gaziantep in southeastern Turkey.

Herodotus's remarks regarding the Royal Road create the false impression that there was only one major road or highway in the entire territory of the Persian Empire. In reality, the four corners of the vast Achaemenid state were linked through a whole network of roads connecting the imperial capital of Susa, which served as the hub of the system, to Egypt in the west, India to the east, and Central Asia to the northeast. For example, a secondary route branched off from the Royal Road near Babylon and turned northeast to the Persian summer capital of Hagmatana or Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) in western Iran. From there it ran along the southern slopes of the Alborz mountain range of northern Iran to Parthia in northeastern Iran and then on to Aria (present-day northwestern Afghanistan), finally moving south toward Drangiana and Arachosia (present-day Qandahar in southern Afghanistan) to India. Another route branching off in Aria moved east to Bactria in northern Afghanistan and after crossing the Oxus River entered Sogdiana, the territory corresponding with present-day Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. A southeastern route linked Susa to another seat of Persian power, namely Persepolis in the southern province of Parsa/Fars (Persis), and continued from there through southeastern Iran to India.

The Royal Road facilitated administrative integration and long-distance trade and commerce as well as the rapid movement of Persian armies and officials throughout the empire. The road served the strategic objective of Darius I, which was to create a more unified and interconnected empire based on an efficient communication system. The "influence of the Royal Road in widening the horizons of the provinces through which it ran must have been considerable, and its importance in the eyes of the Greeks is shown by the prominence given to it in the earliest maps of the Ionian geographers" (Sykes: 164–165). The Royal Road was augmented by major sea routes, which Darius discovered and established during his rule. As Herodotus stated, "the greater part of Asia was discovered by Darius," who "wanted to find out where the Indus joins the sea," and "for this purpose [he] sent off on an expedition down the river a number of men whose word he could trust" (Herodotus: 4.44). The expedition sponsored by the Persian king sailed down the Indus "until they reached the sea; then, turning westward, the ships followed the coast, and after a voyage of some thirty months reached the place from which the king of Egypt had sent out the Phoenicians, whom I have already mentioned, to circumnavigate Libya" (Herodotus: 4.44). As with the roads, the sea routes served two separate but interconnected objectives. First, they served a military purpose. For example, the expedition to India allowed Darius to conduct reconnaissance as the Persian army prepared itself for an invasion of the Indus Valley.

Herodotus wrote that once the voyage to India was completed, "Darius subdued the Indians and made regular use of the southern ocean" (Herodotus: 4.44). Second, the new sea routes also facilitated trade between various provinces of the empire, allowing goods to move rapidly from one region to the other.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; Primary Documents: Document 12

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Sasanian Empire

The Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE) was founded by Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr, a district in the province of Fars in southern Iran. Ardashir, who was a vassal of the Arsacid dynasty, rose against the ruling Arsacid king Artabanus IV and killed him on the battlefield. The death of Artabanus IV signaled the end of the Arsacid dynasty. After overthrowing the Parthian state, Ardashir imposed his authority over the countries and provinces ruled by the Arsacids. In 225 CE he forced the Kushans, who ruled modern-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and vast regions in southern Central Asia, into submission. Ardashir then marched against Roman-held Mesopotamia, attacking Nisibis in present-day southeastern Turkey on the Syrian border. Ardashir's son, Shapur I, fought with three Roman emperors: Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian. These campaigns culminated in the capture of the Roman emperor Valerian by the Persians in 260 CE. Thus, the early Sasanian rulers laid the foundation for a powerful empire, which at its zenith ruled a vast territory extending from Central Asia to Syria.

Ardashir I abolished the decentralized structure he had inherited from the Arsacids and, in distinct contrast, established an absolutist monarchy and a highly centralized political and administrative structure. Additionally, Ardashir and his successors introduced Zoroastrianism as the state religion. Local kings who refused to obey the authority of the Sasanian king of kings were replaced by the members of the Sasanian royal family, usually the sons of the ruling monarch. This does not mean, however, that the Sasanians destroyed the powerful landowning families, such as the Suren and the Karen,

which constituted the backbone of the Parthian state. These families, which were closely allied with the Arsacid ruling family, retained their vast landholdings and the special privileges they had enjoyed during the Parthian period. Indeed, in the second half of the fifth century CE as the Sasanian state declined, the landed nobility resurfaced, and the very families who had played an important role during the Arsacid era began to play a central role in the political life of the Sasanian Empire.

Though Zoroastrian, the first three Sasanian monarchs—Ardashir I, Shapur I, and Hormozd I—seem to have tolerated non-Zoroastrian religious ideas and movements, as evidenced by their willingness to allow the Iranian prophet Mani to preach freely in their domain. Starting with the reign of Bahram I, however, this tolerant attitude changed, and a stricter religious ideology was imposed. As a consequence, during the reign of Bahram I (r. 273–276 CE), Mani was imprisoned, and his followers were persecuted and forced either to flee or go underground. The Sasanian state established Zoroastrianism as its state religion, and the power of the Zoroastrian priesthood significantly increased. Thus, the Zoroastrian chief priest was granted the right to place the imperial crown on the head of the Sasanian monarch at coronation.

Although the Roman Empire remained the principal adversary of the Sasanian state, starting in the fifth century CE a new threat emerged from Central Asia. The nomadic Kidarites and Hephthalites invaded the eastern provinces of the Sasanian state and forced the Sasanian monarchs Bahram V (r. 421–439 CE), Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE), and Peroz I (r. 459–484 CE) to spend much of their reigns on countering the Hephthalite threat. In 484, the Hephthalites defeated and killed the Sasanian monarch Peroz on the battlefield. The victory over the Sasanian army and the death of the Persian king allowed the Hephthalites to invade eastern Iran, forcing the Sasanians to sue for peace and pay an annual tribute. The humiliating defeats at the hands of the Hephthalites undermined the power and legitimacy of the Sasanian state. The Sasanian monarch Kavad I saw the need for social and economic reforms, including curtailing the power of the empire's ruling classes, namely the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. Not surprisingly, Kavad was attracted to the teachings of Mazdak, a member of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy who preached against the greed, arrogance, and unchecked power of the empire's ruling classes. According to Mazdak, the source of evil and suffering in the world was the human fixation with satisfying self-centered desires without any regard for the hardships and needs of fellow human beings. To liberate the human soul from the forces of evil and to create a just and a peaceful society free of competition and

violence, human beings had to abandon greed and selfishness and share the existing resources of their society.

Mazdak's ideas and Kavad's support for them posed a direct threat to the established privileges of the ruling classes, particularly the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy. This formidable coalition was sufficiently powerful to depose Kavad I in 496 and force him to seek refuge with the Hephthalites, among whom he had lived as a hostage after his father's defeat. In 499, Kavad managed to convince the Hephthalites to assist him with raising an army and regaining his throne. The deposed king marched against his opponents and defeated them. Kavad ascended the Sasanian throne for a second time, but he realized that his authority would not be fully secure unless he appeased the anti-Mazdak nobility and priests. The ruling dynasty was itself divided from within among the pro-Mazdak and anti-Mazdak factions. Among the contenders to the throne, Mazdak and his followers favored the older son of Kavad, Kavus, who sympathized with the ideas and objectives of their movement. The younger son, Khosrow, a fervent opponent of Mazdak, was the preferred candidate of the anti-Mazdak nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. After the death of Kavad, Khosrow seized the throne and suppressed the Mazdakite movement by executing Mazdak and many of his followers.

During the reign of Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE), the Sasanian state introduced a series of important reforms, which aimed at curtailing the power of the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian religious establishment and increasing the power of the central government by expanding the size of the Sasanian central government and strengthening the position of the Sasanian king of kings vis-à-vis the provincial power centers. The first and perhaps most important of these reforms was restructuring the archaic tax system of the empire. In the traditional system, taxes were levied on the yield of land. Therefore, from year to year the amount of the tax varied. Khosrow abolished the system based on yearly variation and replaced it with a fixed sum. The Sasanian king also reorganized the administrative structure of his empire. He established a governmental system based on a council of ministers, or divan, headed by a prime minister. Khosrow also reduced the power of the great feudal families who enjoyed enormous influence in the royal court. This did not mean, however, that he attacked the privileges of the dominant economic classes by destroying the prevailing class structure. In fact, Khosrow defended the traditional division of the Iranian society into priests, warriors, government officials, and the members of the fourth estate, which included peasant farmers, artisans, and merchants (*Nameh-ye Tansar:* 57). Another important institution reorganized by Khosrow

was the Sasanian army. To centralize the decision-making process under his direct control, the post of the supreme commander in chief (*erān espahbad/espahbed* or *arteshtārān sālār*) was abolished and replaced by four commanders, or *spahbads*, responsible for the security of the eastern, western, northern, and southern regions of the empire (Tabari: 2.646). Each commander reported directly to the Sasanian king. He also appointed margraves or commanders of the frontiers (*marzbāns*), who also received their orders directly from the Sasanian monarch.

During the reign of Khosrow's grandson, Khosrow II Parvez, the Sasanian Empire reached its greatest extent. In 603, the Persian armies attacked Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. The Sasanian forces quickly marched to upper Mesopotamia and laid siege to the well-fortified Roman fortress of Dara, which was captured in 604. Another Sasanian army attacked Roman forces in Armenia. In 607 the Iranian armies struck again, this time seizing Theodosiopolis in northern Syria in 608 and the important city of Edessa in present-day southern Turkey in 609. In 611, Khosrow II captured Caesarea in the central Anatolian region of Cappadocia. In the same year, the new Byzantine emperor, Heraclius (r. 610–641 CE), sent a delegation to the Sasanian court, but Khosrow refused to recognize Heraclius as the legitimate ruler and ordered the execution of his ambassadors. Meanwhile, the Persians continued their military advance westward. They seized Antioch once again and shortly thereafter reached the Mediterranean coast in 612. A year later in 613, Persian forces defeated a Roman army led by Heraclius and occupied Syria and Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem. There they seized the True Cross of Christian tradition and transported it back to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon in 614. To the north, the Persian armies moved from Cappadocia and quickly reached the Asian shores of the Bosporus in 614. The capital of the East Roman Empire was now within their sight. Since the time of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, no Iranian ruler had extended the borders of his empire so far. At this point, a second Byzantine embassy arrived in the Persian court and pleaded for peace. Emperor Heraclius likewise arrived in the Persian camp with a plea for negotiations. Khosrow, however, rejected a peace settlement.

Remains of the façade and open audience hall of the Sasanian royal palace at Ctesiphon, known as the Arch of Khosrow, in present-day southern Iraq. Ctesiphon served as the capital of the Arsacid/Parthian and Sasanian empires until the Arab invasion of Iran in the seventh century. (AP Photo/Karim Kadim)

The Persian armies went back on the offensive in Asia Minor in 617. A year later in 618, Khosrow deployed his forces in Palestine with the goal of attacking Egypt. His invasion of Egypt succeeded, and the port city of Alexandria was seized in 619. Within a year, the Persian conquest of Egypt had been completed. The fall of Egypt allowed Khosrow to concentrate his main forces in Asia Minor and attack the heartland of the Byzantine state and eventually its capital. When the Persian forces attacked Asia Minor in 622, they advanced rapidly. By 623 they had reached Ancyra (modern-day Ankara), while the Persian naval forces seized the island of Rhodes and several other islands in the eastern Aegean Sea. At this historic juncture, Emperor Heraclius organized a counterattack and surprised the Persians with a swift and determined march against eastern Asia Minor and western Iran. As Khosrow's army disintegrated and the Persian king fled, Heraclius entered Azerbaijan and reached the important Zoroastrian temple at Shiz, which housed the sacred fire of Adur Gushnasp (Azar Goshnasp), and destroyed it. Though defeated, the Persian commanders fought back and forced Heraclius and his army to evacuate Azerbaijan. Under relentless attack from Persian forces, Heraclius retreated to eastern Asia Minor. Determined to drive the Roman forces out of eastern Asia Minor, the Persian forces, under the command of the Persian general Shahrbaraz, attacked the Byzantine forces in southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria, forcing them to

retreat. Shahrbaraz then continued with his westward march, targeting the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, which he reached in the summer of 626.

The battles fought in the summer of 626 would prove devastating for the Sasanians and seal the fate of Khosrow and his armies. As the Persian armies suffered significant losses, an army of Turks allied with the Byzantine emperor invaded, devastating urban and rural communities in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan. Although the Sasanian forces already suffered significant losses in 626, the year 627 proved to be even more disastrous. A massive Turkish invasion from the north devastated the Caucasus region. The strategic town of Darband and the town of Partaw, the capital of Albania (Iranian Arran), were overrun. A Roman army also pushed south toward Azerbaijan and northern Iraq, where in the Battle of Nineveh it defeated the Sasanian forces, which had been sent to block Heraclius's advance against the Persian capital of Ctesiphon in southern Iraq.

Twenty-four years of incessant warfare had exhausted the Sasanian state. Outraged by Khosrow's setbacks, obstinacy, and intransigence, a group of army officers joined by sons of several prominent families organized a plot to overthrow the king and replace him with his son, Kavad Shiruya (Shiroy). On the evening of February 23, 628, the plotters staged their coup. Shiruya was released from detention, and a herald proclaimed him the king of kings. The gates of the jails were also opened, and all prisoners, including Roman prisoners, were allowed to escape. Khosrow fled the palace but was later captured. Two days later, his son Shiruya ascended the throne as Kavad II. The new monarch, who had initially promised to restore peace and reverse the harsh policies of his father, initiated a bloodbath by killing all his brothers. He then ordered the execution of his father. The Sasanian Empire would never recover from this mad rampage. Shiruya died a few months after he had seized the throne. The Persian state began to disintegrate after Shiruya's death.

As army commanders, courtiers, and powerful members of the Persian nobility battled among themselves and eliminated one another, Sasanian territory was invaded on all sides by powerful neighbors. The eastern borders of the empire were breached by the Turks, while the Khazars invaded its northern provinces by using the Caucasus region to raid Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Asia Minor. In the end, however, it was a powerful force bursting out of the Arabian Peninsula that brought about the collapse of the Sasanian state. The Sasanian Empire came to an end when Arab Muslims defeated the Persian armies at Qadisiyyah in 636 CE and again at Nahavand in western Iran in 642 CE. The last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III, was killed in 651 CE near Marv in Central Asia.

In sharp contrast to the Parthian Empire, which was highly decentralized, the founder of the Persian Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir I, and his successors imposed a highly centralized political system under the supreme leadership of the Sasanian king of kings (*shahanshah*), an absolute monarch who claimed divine lineage. Unlike the Arsacids who tolerated religious diversity, the Sasanians promoted Zoroastrianism as the state religion of their empire. Sasanian society was based on a rigid hierarchical social order. At the top of the power pyramid stood the shah, an absolute divine-right monarch. Because in theory the shah enjoyed ultimate God-given authority to rule, his subjects considered him the sole source of legitimate power; he could therefore demand absolute obedience from them. The supreme god, Ahura Mazda, had entrusted his people to him, and the king was responsible for their safety and protection. Next in the hierarchy immediately below the king stood the members of the Sasanian royal family. Below them were the members of the large landowning feudal families (*vispuran*), including the Karen, Suren, etc. These families had already played an important role in the political, military, and economic life of the empire during the Arsacid (Parthian) period. The members of the lesser nobility (*azātān*) and the provincial landed magnates *(dihgans (dihqans)*) also constituted important segments of the Sasanian ruling class.

The late Sasanian state recognized four social classes, or estates. Each of these four estates were divided into several strata. The creation of these four estates was attributed to Jamshid, the legendary king of the Pishdadian dynasty of Greater Iran. The first was the priestly estate, or the men of religion (*asravan*), that consisted of priests, judges, jurists, and teachers. The second was the estate of warriors (*arteshtārān*), which included the members of the army. The third estate comprised scribes and secretaries (*debherān/dabirān*). This estate included scribes who wrote official letters and communications, accountants, authors of chronicles, those who recorded legal judgments and verdicts, and physicians, poets, and astrologers. The fourth estate consisted of peasant cultivators and artisans. Each social estate was under the authority of its own chief and spokesman. Thus, the head of the religious hierarchy was the chief Zoroastrian priest, or *mobadān mobad;* the commander of the army carried the title of military commander of Iran, or *Ērān spahbad;* the head of the civil administration was called *Ērān dibirbad;* and the leader of the fourth estate carried the title *wastrioshān-sālār*, *wastriosh-bad*, or *hotakhshbadh.*

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Ardashir I; Khosrow I Anushiravan; Primary Documents: Document 29; Document 30; Document 33; Document 35

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Scythians

The Scythians were a branch of Iranian people who inhabited vast territories in Central Asia, present-day southern Russia, and the Ukraine from the eighth to the third centuries BCE. Both the nomadic and sedentary populations of Central Asia in ancient times belonged to the same ethnic and linguistic Iranian stock as the Persians who created the first major world empire under the leadership of Cyrus II the Great (r. 558–530 BCE) (Barthold: 1). These Iranian groups are generally referred to as Scythians, Scyths, or Sakas (Melyukova: 97). More recent scholarship has broken down the population of Central

Asia, southern Russia, and the Ukraine in antiquity into Cimerians, who preceded the Scythians, and Sarmatians, who followed them (Onyshkevych: 23). Unfortunately, our sources on the Scythians are scant. The nonarchaeological sources and particularly the writings of Greek historians such as Herodotus provide valuable information, but they are tainted with legendary accounts, fantastic stories, and fairy tales. Our knowledge of the internal structure of Scythian society therefore remains fragmentary, and many important questions remain unanswered.

The few portraits of Scythians known to us have been left on vases discovered in excavation sites such as Kul Oba, near Kerch in eastern Crimea in present-day Ukraine, and at Voronezh in southwestern Russia, not far from Russia's border with Ukraine. Full figures of the Scythians can also be seen on the wall carvings of Persepolis, the ancient palace complex of the Persian Achaemenid monarchs in southern Iran. Here, the Scythians are portrayed as a people with unique national attire and physical appearance. They grew their beards and wore "the pointed cap that protected the ears against the bitter winds of the plains, and the roomy garments—tunic and wide trousers—common to the Sakā and to their Median and Persian cousins" (Grousset: 7).

By all accounts, the Scythians were brilliant archers who relied on their horses, bows, and arrows to attack and defeat their enemies. No consensus exists among historians regarding the original homeland of these ancient people and the date and routes of their migration. The Scythians buried their kings and tribal chiefs in funeral barrows, or burial mounds, called *kurgans.* The *kurgans* were large hills rising from the flat surface of the Eurasian steppes. Some of the *kurgans* could be as wide as 100 yards and 60 feet high. The *kurgans* generally contained the personal belongings of the deceased, his horses, and at times the bodies of wives and servants. Many of them also contained heaps of treasure. The numerous *kurgans* excavated on the Eurasian steppes testify to the power and dynamism of this ancient society. The *kurgans* of the Scythian tribal chiefs—such as the one found in Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains in Siberian Russia south of the present-day town of Novosibirsk near the borders of Russia with China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan—belong to the Bronze Age and contain bodies tattooed with images of animals, fish, and monsters. Such animal-style tattooing was a common characteristic of Scythian culture. Within the burial mound Soviet archaeologists also uncovered horses, cloth saddles, rugs, carpets, and even a four-wheel funeral chariot. Many *kurgans* dating from the fourth century and the beginning of the third century BCE are filled with impressive gold and silver artifacts as well as items of daily use, including combs, rings, shields, armors,

breastplates, vessels, goblets, sheaths, and helmets, many of them produced by Scythian craftsmen and some tailor-made by Greek artists and jewelers to Scythian orders.

Gold vase depicts a Scythian man dressed in his unique national attire and bearing a characteristic physical appearance. The nomadic population of Central Asia in antiquity belonged to the same ethnic Iranian stock as the Persians who created a vast and powerful empire under the leadership of Cyrus II the Great. These Iranian groups, who were generally referred to as Scythians or Sakas, inhabited the vast steppes of Central Eurasia extending from the borders of China in the east to the fertile lands of Crimea and southeastern Europe in the west. (Charles O'Rear/Corbis)

The Scythians enjoyed close economic and commercial ties with Greek communities that had settled north of the Black Sea but also traded with China, India, and Greater Iran. The Scythians were not merely the consumers of high-quality finished goods produced by the Greek, Persian, Chinese, and Indian artists and craftsmen. These ancient nomads had also developed their own advanced and

sophisticated artistic tradition. Treasures unearthed in Tuva, located 50 miles northwest of the city of Kyzyl near the Russian border with Mongolia, reflect the Scythian fascination for and love of gold and golden artifacts. In 1969, Professor Kamal Akishev of the Kazakh Institute of History, Ethnography, and Archaeology uncovered the "Gold Man" in excavations at the Issyk burial mound, 31 miles east of Almaty, Kazakhstan. Professor Akishev dated the skeleton of the Gold Man, who was probably a Scythian prince or a warrior priestess, to the fifth century BCE, while others have suggested the fourth to third century BCE as a more accurate date. The Gold Man was dressed in boots, trousers, and a leather tunic (caftan) decorated with 2,400 arrow-shaped gold plaques. He/she was buried with ceramic, silver, and bronze vessels; a bronze mirror; and flat wooden dishes. In sharp contrast to the *kurgans* of the nobility and aristocracy, who had amassed great wealth through trading, those of ordinary Scythians are characterized by the absence of luxury goods, which indicates significant class stratification and property differentiations among these ancient nomadic groups.

As for their religion, the Scythians had multiple gods and goddesses whom they venerated. In his *Histories*, Herodotus wrote that "the only gods the Scythians" worshipped were "Hestia (their chief deity), Zeus, and Earth (whom they believe to be the wife of Zeus), and, as deities of secondary importance, Apollo, Celestial Aphrodite, Heracles, and Ares" (Herodotus: 4.59). He also wrote that the Scythian god Ares, to whom the Scythians sacrificed prisoners of war, had his own temple and that ceremonies in honor of Ares were conducted differently (Herodotus: 4.62). The Hellenic Ares displays striking parallels with Verethragna, an ancient Iranian warrior god and the god of victory who fights and defeats his opponents, including the evil spirit and its allies. While his name appears as Verethragna (Victory) in the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy scripture, in Middle Persian his name became Wahram, Wahran, or Warahran (New Persian: Bahram). The Scythians relied on their shamans to communicate with natural and supernatural forces. The shaman was an amalgam of a medicine man, a healer, a witch doctor, a mystic, a soothsayer, and a sage who utilized self-induced seizures and trances to establish contact with the world of spirits.

The Scythians did not constitute a homogenous group. The inscriptions of the Persian Achaemenid kings refer to "Amyrgian Scythians," "Scythians with pointed caps," and Scythians "who are across the sea" (Kent: 138, 151, 156). Herodotus also distinguished between Scythians and royal Scythians (Herodotus: 4.59). The Scythians were divided into numerous tribal groups, with each led by its own king or chief. These hereditary rulers relied on the taxes they

collected from the members of the tribe to maintain their political and military power. Trade and warfare also played an important role in the political and economic life of these ancient communities. For example, Scythians who had settled on the northern shores of the Black Sea exported corn to the Greek city-states and imported high-quality finished products in silver and gold from their southern neighbors. All was not, however, peaceful between the Scythians and their neighbors to the south. The Scythians waged numerous attacks on Asia Minor and as far south as Mesopotamia, using the Caucasus region as a corridor to penetrate the warmer regions where urban civilizations had flourished and prospered. Herodotus reported that the Scythians overran Media and ruled that country for nearly three decades before the Median king Cyaxares defeated them. Remnants of Scythian arms and tools of warfare, such as bronze arrowheads, have been discovered in regions as far south as Armenia and Syria. Raiding campaigns such as these required the ability to travel long distances, a high level of discipline and strategic planning, and leadership capable of mobilizing an army and conceiving and executing an action plan. The raids on the urban and agricultural communities of Central and West Asia provided the Scythian nobility and their nomadic warriors with booty. Scythian raids were prompted by the harsh conditions of the Eurasian steppes, including famine and starvation. In light of this, herds of sheep, goats, and horses constituted one of the most important parts of the booty that Scythians seized.

Despite repeated efforts, the Persian Achaemenid dynasty failed to subdue the highly mobile and fiercely independent Scythians. According to Herodotus, Cyrus II the Great (r. 559/558–530 BCE) was killed in Central Asia in a battle against a Scythian tribe known as the Massagetae, who were ruled by their queen Tomyris (Herodotus: 1.214). In his inscription at Bisotun in western Iran, the Persian king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) stated that he organized a campaign against the Scythians (Sakas), who wore pointed caps. To reach the land of these Scythians, a Persian army used rafts to cross a body of water, described by Darius in the inscription as a sea. The Persian forces crossed the sea by rafts and defeated the Scythians. The Scythian leader Skunkha was captured and brought to Darius, who ordered his execution (Kent: 133–134).

After defeating the last Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, in 331 BCE, Alexander the Great invaded Iran and Central Asia. In response, Bessus, the governor of Bactria, who had proclaimed himself king of Asia and assumed the royal title “Artaxerxes,” organized his Bactrian, Sogdian, and Scythian units into a formidable force and adopted a scorched-earth policy, denying the Macedonian armies access to food and water. Soon, however, he was betrayed by his generals and

handed over to Alexander, who humiliated him by cutting off his nose and the tips of his ears in public before sending him to his death (Arrian: 4.7–8). After the execution of Bessus, some Scythians joined the Sogdian commander Spitaman (Spitamanes) as he fought the Macedonian invaders. After scoring several victories against the Macedonians, Spitaman was eventually betrayed by his Scythian allies, who murdered him.

Beginning in third century BCE, the Scythians of Central Asia played a central role in shaping the political future of Greater Iran. Arsaces (Arshak), the founder of the Arsacid dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE), was a Scythian chief who emerged as the leader of the Parni or Aparni, a nomadic group within the Dahae confederacy. The Greek author Strabo wrote that Arsaces was a Scythian chief who led the Parni, a branch of the Dahae confederacy, a nomadic group who lived along the Ochus (Strabo: 11.9.2). In his account of Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia, the historian Arrian mentions the Dahae as a group living in close proximity to the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) in Central Asia (Arrian: 3.28). Sometime during the last years of the fourth century or the earliest part of the third century BCE, the Parni began to move south from Central Asia. Based on recent excavations, archaeologists have concluded that the territory of southwestern Turkmenistan, particularly "the northern part of Dehistan in the area of the river Uzboj," was "in the 4th–3rd centuries BC the cradle of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty" (Lecomte: 144).

By 250 BCE, the Parni had established themselves on the shores of the Atrek River. In 247 BCE, Arsaces I was crowned as king in Asaac (Asaak). The exact location of Asaac is unknown, but some scholars have suggested that it was located near the present-day town of Quchan in the upper Atrek River Valley in northeastern Iran (Debevoise: 10–11). The year 247 marks the beginning of the Parthian era. The rise of Arsaces corresponded with the growing decline of the Seleucid state, which had been founded in Babylon in present-day southern Iraq in 312 BCE. The incessant military campaigns against the Ptolemaic dynasty centered in Egypt exhausted the Seleucid treasury and diverted the attention of its rulers from the eastern provinces of their empire. The city of Antioch, which served as the capital of the Seleucid kings, was situated on the western borders of the empire and a long way away from Iran and Central Asia.

Sometime between 250 and 239 BCE, two important rebellions erupted against the authority of the Seleucid state. Diodotus, the Seleucid governor of Bactria, and Andragoras, the governor of the province of Parthia, revolted and proclaimed their independence. Shortly after these revolts in 238 BCE, the Parni under the leadership of Arsaces I took advantage of the chaos in the eastern provinces of

the Seleucid state and invaded and conquered Parthia. The self-proclaimed independent ruler of Parthia, Andragoras, was killed, and his small kingdom emerged as the new home and operational base for Arsaces I. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or as those who hail from Parthia, a name the Greek and Roman authors used when referring to them and their empire. A short time after the conquest of Parthia, Arsaces marched west and seized Hyrcania (Justin: XLI.4). The acquisition of Parthia and Hyrcania allowed Arsaces to raise a large army to defend himself against a possible attack from the Seleucids to the west and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom to the east. After the death of Theodotus I, the founder of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, Arsaces I made peace and entered into an alliance with his son, Theodotus II (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II (r. 246–225 BCE) invaded eastern Iran to punish the Parthians, Arsaces I scored a victory against the Seleucid monarch, a momentous milestone that the Parthians would observe "with great solemnity as the commencement of their liberty" (Justin: XLI.4). When Seleucus II was forced to return west to quell disturbances, Arsaces I used the respite as an opportunity to lay the foundation of the Parthian government, "levy soldiers, fortify castles, and secure the fidelity of his cities" (Justin: XLI.5.1). He built a city called "Dara," which was designed and built in such a way that it did not need a "garrison to defend it" (Justin: XLI.5.1–2). Having "at once acquired and established a kingdom," Arsaces I died "in a good old age" circa 217 BCE (Justin: XLI.5). He was succeeded by his son, Arsaces II. Under his successors, beginning with the capable Arsacid monarchs Phraates I and his brother Mithridates I, who was proclaimed king in 171 BCE, Arsaces's small kingdom broke out of northeastern Iran and gradually emerged as a powerful empire, which at its zenith ruled a vast territory extending from the southern regions of Central Asia to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia.

The movement of the Scythian groups in the direction of present-day northeastern Iran and northern Afghanistan continued after the establishment of the Arsacid dynasty. The Kushans, who established a vast empire in the second century BCE in Central and South Asia, hailed from the Scythians of the Tarim Basin. They were a branch of people called Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) by the Chinese and Tochari by the Greeks and Romans. The Yüeh-chih moved from Central Asia first to Bactria in the second century BCE. They divided their newly won territory into five principalities. Nearly a century later, the Kushan prince Kujula Kadphises unified all the Yüeh-chih branches under his rule. From their base in Bactria, the Kushans also crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range in the direction of India and occupied Gandhara. The occupation of Gandhara, southeast of the Hindu Kush Mountains,

allowed the Kushans to extend their power to the Indus River Valley and the city of Taxila. From here, the Kushans moved farther south to the region of the Yamuna River in the present-day northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where they chose the city of Mathura as their southern capital. Thus, by the beginning of the second century CE, the Kushans, along with the Romans, Parthians, and Chinese, were among the four most powerful states in the world. They ruled vast territories in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The Kushan Empire incorporated what is now Tajikistan, a large part of Uzbekistan, possibly parts of Kyrgyzstan and southern Turkmenistan, almost all of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and parts of northern India. In 224 CE, Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr in southern Iran, overthrew the Arsacid state and established the Sasanian dynasty. In 225 Ardashir moved against the Kushans, who submitted to his rule.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I; *K&Q, Median:* Cyaxares/ Huvakhshtra; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Arsacids; Media, Medes, and the Median Empire

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Seleucids

A Macedonian dynasty founded by one of the generals of Alexander the Great, Seleucus, after 312. At the height of its power, the Seleucid state ruled a vast empire extending from present-day Afghanistan in the east to Syria, Palestine, and present-day Lebanon in the west.

After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE in Babylon, his army commanders turned against one another as each tried to carve out his own kingdom. After many years of internecine warfare, Greater Iran, Mesopotamia, and a large part of Asia Minor came under the rule of Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals. Seleucus was the son of Antiochus, a commander in the army of Phillip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander. Seleucus participated in Alexander's campaigns against the last Persian Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, and led the Macedonian army units in their battle against King Porus, a ruler in India.

In 324 BCE, a year before his death, Alexander organized a mass wedding party at Susa in present-day southwestern Iran, where he ordered his generals to marry Iranian wives. He hoped that these marriages would create unity between the Macedonians and Iranians. Seleucus was ordered to marry Apame (Apama), a daughter of the Sogdian dignitary Spitaman. The Seleucid dynasty "sprang from this Macedonian-Iranian union" (Bickerman: 4).

Seleucid Empire

After many years of fighting for his own kingdom, Seleucus seized Babylon in 312 BCE. This marked the beginning of the Seleucid era. Beginning in 305 BCE, Seleucus expanded his kingdom eastward, bringing much of present-day Iran and Afghanistan under his rule. In 303 BCE, Seleucus assumed the title of king and established his capital at Seleucia-on-Tigris in present-day southern Iraq. He also used his newly acquired kingdom as a territorial base to extend his rule over Iran. Seleucus captured Media in western Iran and Susiana in southwestern Iran and soon extended his control as far east as Bactria in northern Afghanistan. However, Media Atropatene (present-day Azerbaijan), in northwestern Iran, and Chorasmia, on the lower reaches of the Oxus south of the Aral Sea, remained independent under their own rulers. Seleucus also failed to capture the Indus River basin, which was ceded to Chandragupta, the founder of the powerful Maurya dynasty based in northern India.

After the end of his campaign in the east, Seleucus returned west in 303 BCE. He joined a coalition of several kings, which was formed to contain and defeat the powerful and ambitious Antigonus, another former general of Alexander, who ruled much of Asia Minor. In 301 BCE, Antigonus was defeated and killed at Ipsus in Phrygia (west-central Asia Minor) in the Battle of the Kings. The victors then divided the kingdom of Antigonus, with Seleucus receiving Syria, though another of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy of Egypt, had already occupied the southern part of the country, known as Coele Syria. The occupation of southern Syria by Ptolemy caused a conflict between the

Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria that continued for over a century.

In 300 BCE, Seleucus transferred his capital from Seleucia-on-Tigris to a new capital, Antioch, in northern Syria (present-day southern Turkey), which he built on the shores of the Orontes River. This proved to be a fatal decision. The long distance between the new capital and the faraway eastern provinces of the empire in Iran and Central Asia allowed the governors of these regions to revolt and establish their own independent kingdoms. It also provided an opportunity for various nomadic groups in Central Asia to invade the eastern provinces of the Seleucid Empire, dislodge the Seleucid-appointed governors, and establish their own dynasties. Arsaces (Arshak), the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, was one of these nomadic chiefs who created his own kingdom after invading northeastern Iran from Central Asia.

The successors to Seleucus I tried several times to reassert their authority in the east. In 209 BCE, Antiochus III (r. 222–187 BCE) organized a campaign to reestablish Seleucid rule over present-day Iran and northern Afghanistan. He had already conquered the eastern Mediterranean coast, including the seaport of Seleucia-in-Pieria (Tyre in present-day Lebanon), as well as Phoenicia and Palestine. Antiochus's conquests resulted in a military confrontation with the ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy IV, in 217 BCE. In a peace treaty signed following the battle, Antiochus returned all his newly gained territories with the sole exception of Seleucia-in-Pieria, which he managed to retain. He followed his wars with Egypt with a campaign to impose Seleucid authority over Asia Minor. By 213 BCE, he had occupied Sardis in western Asia Minor. In 209 BCE, Antiochus III embarked on an eastern campaign to impose his authority over Iran. He intended to neutralize the threat posed by the newly emerging Arsacid state, which had established itself in Parthia. Antiochus managed to force the Arsacids to make a tactical retreat and acknowledge Seleucid suzerainty, but he failed to destroy them. Antiochus also tried to neutralize the threat posed by Euthydemus, the ruler of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. As with the Arsacids, here too Antiochus could not dislodge Euthydemus and impose his direct rule. From Bactria, Antiochus crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and entered the Kabul Valley. He then moved to Arachosia (present-day Qandahar in southern Afghanistan) and, marching through the southeastern Iranian provinces of Drangiana (modern-day Sistan-Baluchistan) and Carmania (modern-day Kerman), reached Parsa (Persis), the birthplace of the Achaemenid dynasty in southern Iran. Having reestablished a network of vassal kingdoms in Iran, Antiochus

assumed the Persian Achaemenid title “Great King.” The Greeks honored him with the title “the Great.” After he had returned to Syria, Antiochus used the booty he had collected from his Iranian campaign to attack Egypt. The death of the king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV, offered Antiochus an opportunity to seize southern Syria as well as the southern coastal regions of Asia Minor and the island of Cyprus. After concluding an alliance with Philip V of Macedonia, who sought to impose his rule over western Asia Minor, Antiochus attacked and defeated the Egyptian army sent against him in 200 BCE. With this victory, the Seleucid monarch emerged as the master of southern Syria and Palestine. The military operations of Antiochus’s ally, Philip of Macedonia, forced the smaller and more vulnerable states of western Asia Minor to appeal to Rome for protection. This plea allowed Rome to intervene militarily, defeating Philip of Macedonia. Instead of rushing to the rescue of his ally, Antiochus used the war between Rome and Philip V to attack and occupy the possessions of Ptolemy V in southern Syria and Asia Minor.

Confident of his power, Antiochus now decided to incorporate Thrace and Greece into his empire. Despite repeated diplomatic efforts from Rome, which warned Antiochus against crossing into Europe, the Seleucid monarch continued with his westward push into mainland Greece. In 190 BCE, the Romans finally crossed into Asia. Antiochus, whose fleet had already been destroyed by the combined naval forces of Rome, Rhodes, and Pergamum, sued for peace, but the Romans now demanded that he should withdraw his forces from all his possessions north and west of the Taurus Mountains in present-day southern Turkey. Antiochus rejected the Roman demand and opted for military confrontation. When the two armies clashed in the Battle of Magnesia in late 190 BCE, Antiochus suffered a humiliating defeat. In the Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE, Antiochus renounced all his claims to territories north and west of the Taurus mountain range in southern Asia Minor. He also agreed to send to Rome a group of hostages, including his son, the future Antiochus IV; to pay a heavy war indemnity; and to surrender his fleet and elephants.

With the defeat at the hands of the Romans, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Iran. The defeat at Magnesia undermined the credibility of the Seleucids and convinced the Arsacids (Parthians), based in northeastern Iran, to restart their campaigns of territorial expansion into central and western Iran. By the time the Seleucid king Antiochus IV (r. 175–164 BCE) seized the throne in Syria, the power of the Seleucid monarchy was waning rapidly in eastern Iran, though the Seleucid state maintained its rule over Mesopotamia and parts of western and southwestern Iran. Early in his reign, the conflict between the Seleucids and the Ptolemaic

dynasty of Egypt erupted once again over the control of southern Syria, Palestine, and Phoenicia. Both Ptolemaic Egypt and the Seleucid kingdom, which had been significantly weakened by decades of warfare and interdynastic rivalries, requested intervention from Rome, but the Roman Senate refused to become involved. In 173 BCE, Antiochus IV paid in full the remainder of the war indemnity imposed on his father by Rome in 188 BCE. In 169 and again in 168 BCE he invaded and occupied Egypt, but under an ultimatum from Rome he was forced to withdraw, although he managed to retain his control over southern Syria. Antiochus organized a military campaign against the Parthians of northeastern Iran, who were pushing their territorial possessions westward, threatening the Seleucid-held Media in north-central and western Iran. Antiochus marched against Armenia and imposed his suzerainty over the Armenian king, Artaxias. Antiochus then led his forces to Elymais to plunder the treasures of an Artemis temple. In Persis in southern Iran, the people revolted against him and forced the Seleucid monarch and his army to withdraw from their province. He then went to Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan in western Iran), the capital of Media, where he injured himself after falling from his chariot. Antiochus IV died from an illness in central Iran in 164 BCE. The planned invasion of Parthia never materialized.

By 145 BCE, when Demetrius II (r. 145–140/139 BCE) ascended the Seleucid throne, the Arsacids, under the leadership of Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE), were expanding their domains from northeastern Iran to the lands east, west, and southwest of their kingdom. First, Mithridates I defeated the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. He then pushed west and seized Media sometime in 148 or 147 BCE. Next, the Parthian armies invaded Mesopotamia and captured Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia-on-Tigris in 141 BCE. The victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by invading Iran. This campaign proved to be disastrous. Demetrius was defeated and captured by the Arsacids in 139 BCE. The humiliated Seleucid king was first paraded in public and then transported to Hyrcania in northern Iran, where Mithridates I received him with kindness. Demetrius tried twice to escape northeastern Iran and return to Syria, but both attempts proved futile, and he was captured. Meanwhile in Syria, his wife and queen, Cleopatra Thea, ascended the throne as regent. However, a usurper named Tryphon emerged as a pretender to the throne. To save the Seleucid state, the younger brother of Demetrius II, Antiochus, returned to Syria in 139 BCE. He ascended the throne as Antiochus VII and married his brother's wife, Cleopatra Thea. In 138 BCE Antiochus defeated Tryphon before moving against Jerusalem, which he captured in 135/134 BCE.

With Palestine under his rule, Antiochus VII shifted his focus to the east with the goal of restoring Seleucid rule in Iran. In 130 BCE, he attacked and defeated Parthian armies in three military campaigns. With winter approaching, Antiochus scattered his army and stationed its various units in different towns and cities of western Iran. The behavior of these units, however, caused the populace in several urban centers to revolt against Antiochus VII. The Arsacid monarch, Phraates II, used this golden opportunity to put an army in the field. Wishing "to feel out" his enemy first, Phraates II sent envoys "to discuss terms of peace" (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.14.15). Antiochus VII responded that he would be willing to cease hostilities and conclude a peace treaty only if certain conditions were met. He demanded that Phraates release his brother, Demetrius, from captivity; withdraw forces from the provinces that the Parthians had seized; and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.14.15). Phraates II rejected these demands. The Arsacid king released Demetrius from captivity and allowed him to return to Syria. Phraates probably hoped that the return of Demetrius would result in a civil war between the two brothers. Phraates also placed a large army in the field. Against the advice of his officials who pleaded with him to avoid a hasty foray, Antiochus marched against the much larger Parthian force. When the two armies joined battle, Phraates II defeated Antiochus, who was killed on the battlefield (*Diodorus Siculus:* XXXIV/XXXV.15.16). Though victorious against a formidable adversary, Phraates II organized a magnificent funeral for the fallen Seleucid monarch and sent his body to Syria in a silver casket. Phraates also married the daughter of Demetrius II who had accompanied Antiochus VII to Iran (Justin: XXXVIII.10). The victory of Phraates II over Antiochus VII put an end to Seleucid rule in Iran. With the death of Antiochus VII, Syria was engulfed in a civil war. In 64 BCE the remaining territory of the Seleucid state, which was confined to Syria and the southern coastal region of Asia Minor in present-day Turkey, was conquered by the Romans. With the disappearance of the Seleucid state, the Roman Republic and the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire became neighbors.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius III; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Seleucus I Nicator; *Peoples:* Achaemenid Empire; Primary Documents: Document 23

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Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr

Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr [The Provincial Capitals of Iran] is a book of geography written in Middle Persian. The book lists the important cities of ancient Iran, the history of their construction, and their significance in Iranian political and religious history. The author divides Eranshahr (Land of Iran) into four distinct regions: the northeast, or Khwarasan (New Persian: Khorasan); the southwest, or Khwarwaran (New Persian: Khavaran); the southeast, or Nemroz (New Persian: Nimruz); and the northwest, or Adurbadagan (New Persian: Azerbaijan). *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr* relies on a mixture of historical, religious, and legendary sources, including traditional stories and myths from ancient Iran and various accounts from the Zoroastrian scripture, the *Avesta.* We do not know the date for the first composition of the text of *Shahrestanha-ye Eranshahr*, but from references to cities, countries, and individuals in the book, it becomes clear that the material was revised on several occasions during the reign of the Sasanian dynasty as well as during the Islamic era. The final version of the text was most probably prepared during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–775 CE).

See also: *Ancient Provinces:* Abar Shahr; *Cultures:* Middle Persian; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Spitaman

An Iranian Sogdian dignitary during the reign of the last Achaemenid king, Darius III (r. 336–330 BCE), who successfully fought Alexander the Great and his Macedonian armies in Bactria and Sogdiana before he was betrayed by his Scythian allies, who murdered him. In the modern historiography of the Persian Tajik people of Central Asia, Spitaman is celebrated as a national hero who fought foreign invaders to preserve the independence of his country.

The birthplace and much of the career of Spitaman as a Persian official and commander in the late Achaemenid period is unknown. His name appears in the context of Alexander's invasion of the Persian Empire and the occupation of the provinces of Bactria and Sogdiana by the Macedonian armies. After the death of Darius III and the fall of the Achaemenid state, Spitaman, known to the Greeks as Spitamanes, was for a time an ally of Bessus, the governor of Bactria. Bessus was one of the Persian generals who fought Alexander when the latter invaded the Persian Achaemenid Empire. After the defeat of the Achaemenid forces in the Battle of Gaugamela or Arbela in present-day northern Iraq in 331 BCE, Darius III, accompanied by several of his generals, including Bessus, fled first to the Achaemenid capital, Hagmatana/Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan), in present-day western Iran, and then east toward Parthia in northeastern Iran and Bactria in

present-day northern Afghanistan. The ill-fated king was, however, murdered by Bessus. Freed from all his obligations to the Persian king, Bessus proclaimed himself the king of Asia, "wearing the royal mantle and the cap with the point erect, in royal fashion," and adopted the royal title "Artaxerxes" (Arrian: 3.25). Hoping to delay Alexander's march against Bactria and Central Asia, Bessus adopted a scorched-earth policy, laying waste to the land and burning the crops. Despite Bessus's best efforts, however, Alexander continued with his march, capturing Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan, moving to Drangiana and then turning north and attacking Bactria, forcing Bessus to seek refuge in Sogdiana, the region lying north of the Oxus River and south of the Jaxartes. Throughout the conflict between Alexander and Bessus, Spitaman stood by the Bactrian governor and provided him with necessary support. Indeed, the Greek historians of Alexander's campaign wrote that aside from his own troops, Bessus also had fighting units from the armies of Spitaman and Oxyartes as well as cavalry units from Sogdiana and the Daae tribal units under his command. For reasons unknown to us, at the very moment when they were organizing a formidable army to fight Alexander, Spitaman and another general, Dataphernes, arrested Bessus and contacted Alexander to negotiate the process of handing the rebel governor over to the Macedonians (Arrian: 3.30). According to one account, at the last moment Spitaman changed his mind and refused to betray Bessus by handing him over to the Macedonians, while a second source maintained that Bessus was in fact sent to Alexander by Spitaman and Dataphernes. Regardless, Bessus was seized and brought to Alexander. After humiliating and torturing him in public, Alexander ordered his men to execute the Persian general.

In 329 BCE Spitaman, who had probably betrayed Bessus to avoid a confrontation with Alexander, revolted against the Macedonian invaders. The center of the revolt was his home province of Sogdiana, located immediately to the north of Bactria. Spitaman and his army laid siege to Maracanda (Samarqand), forcing Alexander to dispatch an army under the command of his general, Pharnuches, to suppress the rebellion. When the battle was joined, Spitaman inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Macedonian force, which was destroyed after suffering heavy casualties. When Alexander hurried to Maracanda to relieve the city, he was informed that Spitaman had already departed for Bactria. In 328 BCE Spitaman attacked Bactria, but the governor of the province, Artabazus, managed to drive him off. Now Spitaman, joined by the Massagetae, a Scythian group, attacked one of the forts in Bactria and seized it. Emboldened by this success, Spitaman then attacked Zariaspa, and though he could not capture the city, his army managed to seize "a lot of livestock" and

carry it off as booty (Arrian: 4.16). When the Macedonian cavalry stationed in Zariaspa tried to recover the livestock, they were ambushed and defeated by Spitaman. Despite his best efforts to rally the Sogdians and Scythians against the Macedonian invaders, Spitaman was finally defeated by Alexander's general Coenus, who had succeeded Artabazus as the governor of Bactria. After this defeat, Spitaman was deserted by most of his Bactrian and Sogdian units. He was eventually betrayed by his allies, the Massagetae Scythians, who murdered him and sent his head to Alexander, suing for peace with the Macedonian conqueror (Arrian: 4.17).

Spitaman had a daughter named Apame (Apama). In 324 BCE, a year before his death, Alexander organized a mass wedding party at Susa in present-day southwestern Iran and ordered his generals to marry Iranian wives. He hoped that these marriages would create unity between the Macedonians and Iranians. The Macedonian general Seleucus was ordered to marry Apame. The Seleucid dynasty was formed by this union between Apame and Seleucus, who would emerge as the founder of the Seleucid state after 312 BCE (Bickerman: 4). Seleucus I Nicator and Apame had a son, Antiochus, who would succeed his father as Antiochus I (Soter), the second monarch of the Seleucid dynasty.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius III; *K&Q, Seleucid:* Apame/Apama; *Peoples:* Bessus

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Prophets, Poets, Scientists, Historians, and Artists

OVERVIEW ESSAY

This chapter includes entries about a variety of distinguished individuals who played important roles in the social and cultural history of ancient Iran and also includes entries describing historians and others who directly or indirectly contributed to our understanding of the political, cultural, and artistic achievements of ancient Iranians. The first group includes great prophets of ancient Iran such as Zarathustra (Zoroaster) and Mani as well as influential members of the Zoroastrian religious establishment such as the Sasanian high priest Kartir and the radical reformer Mazdak. The second group comprises representatives of Iran's intellectual class, namely prominent scientists, artists, and writers. These include the Persian scientist, traveler, and translator Borzuye, who sought out and brought back to the Sasanian court great classics of Indian literature, and the prominent Sasanian court musician, Barbad, who became the confidant of kings.

The great Persian epic poet Ferdowsi is also described here. Given the paucity of other original Persian sources, Ferdowsi's works are particularly valuable. His writings, including the epic poetry of the *Shahnameh*, have allowed us to develop a better understanding of the complex history and traditions of the people who populated and sustained the great empires of ancient Persia. In this chapter we have also included entries on notable Greek historians and authors whose writings have contributed to a better understanding of key events in the ancient world and Iran's role and significance in them. Such authors include Herodotus, whose work *The Histories* offered an account of the rise of the Achaemenid Empire and the reigns of its most powerful kings; Agathias, a historian and poet who also composed *The Histories*, an account of the Sasanian dynasty; and the Achaemenid royal physician Ctesias of Knidos, whose book *Persica*, written in his retirement, offered sometimes fanciful accounts of

Achaemenid court intrigues. Finally, we come to the Greek officer, author, and historian Xenophon, whose numerous histories offered accounts of the Achaemenid Empire and its rulers. Among his best-known works is *Cyropaedia* [The Education of Cyrus], a partly fictional biography of the Persian king Cyrus II.

Agathias

Agathias, also known as Agathias Scholasticus, was a Greek historian and poet whose writings include an important historical account of the Persian Sasanian dynasty and the Roman–Sasanian wars during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I and the Persian king of kings Khosrow I Anushiravan. Agathias was born in 530, or according to some sources 536 or 537, in the village of Myrina (Mysia) in western Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). He studied law in Alexandria and completed his studies in Constantinople. After completing his legal training, he remained in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and began to practice law as an advocate, or *scholasticus.* He also wrote poetry. He put together an anthology of his own epigrams along with those of other past and contemporary poets. After the death of the Roman emperor Justinian in 565 CE, Agathias began to write a history of his times, which came to be known as the *History of Justinian.* The five-volume book covers the important events that took place during the reign of Justinian from 553 to 559. Agathias died in 580 or 582 before completing his work.

Agathias's writings provide historians with highly valuable and relevant information about several major events, which took place in the sixth century CE. He offers a comprehensive and thorough account of the Frankish invasion of Italy in the 550s. This invasion was defeated by the Roman general Narses. Agathias also wrote about the invasion of Asia Minor and the attack on the city of Constantinople by the Huns under the leadership of Zabergan and how this was thwarted by a small force of Roman officers and soldiers commanded by the hero of the hour, Belisarius.

The importance of Agathias's five-volume history for historians of ancient Iran is his coverage of the wars between the Byzantine emperor Justinian and the Persian monarch Khosrow I, known by his title "Anushiravan" (immortal soul). Agathias did not, however, confine himself to covering the military confrontations between the two empires and their armies. He also added highly valuable information on the Sasanian dynasty, which had seized power in 224 CE after defeating and overthrowing the ruling Arsacids. Through his

contact with a Syrian translator and interpreter who worked for the Sasanian court, Agathias acquired access to the Persian royal archives and used the annals and documents he had studied in his narrative. He provided his readers with a chronological list of Sasanian kings beginning with Ardashir I, the founder of the dynasty, and ending with Khosrow I, who died as Agathias was writing his history. Though there are many factual mistakes in his account, Agathias's history is extremely valuable and indeed essential for those studying the history of the Sasanian period, particularly for events relating to the reign of Khosrow I, who was undoubtedly one of the most important rulers of the Sasanian dynasty.

Agathias's account of the wars between the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires focuses primarily on the military campaigns organized and fought by the two powers in Lazica. The kingdom of Lazica was situated on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, corresponding with the western regions of the present-day Republic of Georgia in the southern Caucasus. Because of its proximity to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Caspian Sea, the kingdom of Lazica played an important role in the strategic calculations of both the Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire. The Byzantine emperors could not afford losing Lazica, because it provided their empire with a natural barrier against any Persian advance toward the Black Sea coast. For the Persians, the conquest of the strategic kingdom provided access to the trade and commerce of the western Caucasus and the Black Sea, from which they could also threaten the Byzantine provinces of Asia Minor and the city of Constantinople itself. The so-called Lazic War lasted for two decades, beginning in 541 and ending in 562. In his description, Agathias portrayed the Persian Sasanians as the invaders and the Lazi and their Byzantine allies as the defenders of peace and the status quo. Agathias wrote about the murder of the ruler of Lazica, Gubazes, by two Byzantine commanders and how the Sasanian forces were eventually defeated by the Byzantine generals Martin and Justin. Of great importance is Agathias's tendency to depart from the main narrative to discuss various aspects of Persian culture and religion, including the prevailing customs and traditions among the ruling Sasanians. As with the majority of the Greek authors of antiquity, Agathias displayed a deep-seated hatred of and disdain for the Persians, whom he branded as "barbarians." He reserved his deepest contempt and scornful remarks, however, for the Persian monarch Khosrow I, ridiculing the Sasanian king as a phony philosopher-king.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire

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Barbad

Barbad was a musician and poet in the court of Khosrow II Parvez (the Victorious), who ruled the Persian Sasanian Empire from 590 to 628 CE. Barbad was originally from the city of Marv in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan. Legendary accounts of his rise to prominence claim that despite his exceptional talents, Barbad was prevented from realizing his dream of becoming the king's musician and singer by Sargis (Sarkash), the royal court's jealous minstrel, who feared that he would lose his privileged status if Barbad performed in front of the king. To convince the king of his talent as a musician, Barbad, having dressed all in green, concealed himself among the leaves of a tree in the royal garden during a reception attended by the Sasanian monarch and his guests. At an opportune time during the banquet Barbad began to play and sing, performing several songs, which delighted the king, who asked him to come down from the tree and identify himself. The Sasanian monarch showered the young and talented musician with royal praise and gifts.

Illustration from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] depicts the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz) listening to the music of Barbad, who is concealed in a tree. As the most accomplished poet and musician of the late Sasanian era, Barbad emerged as an influential member of the Sasanian court during the long reign of Khosrow II. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Barbad was quickly elevated to the status of court musician. Aside from taking great delight in his songs, the king enjoyed Barbad's company. During the Islamic era many legendary accounts and stories developed about the close friendship between the king and his musician. According to these accounts, those who wished to receive a favor from the king requested Barbad to intercede on their behalf. When the king's favorite horse, Shabdez (Shabdiz), died suddenly, no one dared to convey the terrible news to the king. The frightened courtiers agreed that the only individual who could break the bad news would be Barbad. The court musician composed a poem and a song that contained verses informing the king of the demise of his horse. Barbad's relationship with the king was so friendly that the Christian Sasanian queen Shirin asked Barbad to remind her royal husband through a song of the castle he had promised to build for her. As a court musician, Barbad performed at royal banquets and at the great national festivals, including the Persian New Year (Nowruz) and Mihragan (Mihrgan). The close relationship between king and musician ended abruptly, however, when Khosrow II was overthrown and subsequently executed by his own son, Kavad II Shiruya (Shiroy). Barbad, who was traveling at the time, rushed back to the capital city of Ctesiphon, where he recited elegies about the deceased monarch. The Persian epic poet Ferdowsi wrote that Barbad was so grief-stricken by the death of his royal patron that he cut off four of his fingers and burned all of his instruments. Several historians of the Islamic era claimed that Barbad died after he was poisoned by his longtime rival, Sargis. However, at least one historian rejected this story and countered that it was Barbad who poisoned Sargis and put an end to the life of a rival who had persistently tried to block his rise to power. These stories reflect the fascination surrounding the life and career of Barbad, a fascination that persisted for centuries after his death. Barbad remains a highly esteemed cultural and artistic icon in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. In Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, the largest concert hall, which serves as the venue for major cultural programs and musical performances, is named after the Persian musician who stole the heart of an emperor through his music while sitting concealed among green leaves atop a tree.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Kavad II Shiruya; Khosrow II Parvez

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Borzuye

Borzuye was the gifted and celebrated physician of the late Sasanian era who served the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE). Borzuye is also known as a translator of numerous scholarly and literary works, including the classic work *Pañcatantra* [Five Principles]. This collection of animal fables, known in Persian as *Kalila va Demna* and in Europe as the *Fables of Bidpai*, continues to be read today. Borzuye completed its original translation from Sanskrit into Middle Persian after a visit to India.

Borzuye was born either in Abarshahr in western Khorasan or in Marv (Merv), the capital of Khorasan and today a city in the Republic of Turkmenistan. Borzuye's father was an officer in the Sasanian army, and his mother hailed from a prominent religious family. He enrolled in school at the age of seven. After completing his primary education, he studied medicine and became a physician.

Borzuye came of age during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan. A highly energetic and dynamic ruler, Khosrow dedicated his rule to the restoration of the power of the Sasanian central government, the suppression of the radical Mazdakite movement, and the reform of the financial, social, economic, and military institutions of his empire. For much of his reign, Khosrow I was preoccupied with wars against the Byzantine Empire in the west and the Hephthalites to the east. Aside from campaigns in the west and the east, Khosrow spent much of his reign in implementing his reforms. Despite his ambitious agenda, however, he acted as the great patron of arts and sciences. When in 529 the academy of Athens was closed, a group of Greek philosophers fled to Sasanian territory. Khosrow welcomed them and allowed these scholars to settle in his empire. The Sasanian king also expanded the prestigious medical school at Gondishapur, which emerged as one of the world's most important centers of learning, training, and research in late antiquity. Located in Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan, the city of Gondishapur was founded by the Sasanian monarch Shapur I. During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty, the city emerged as one of the most prosperous urban centers of the Persian Empire. The Sasanians built a

medical center in the city, which included a major library. During the reign of Khosrow I, a hospital was added to the medical complex. At this hospital Persian, Greek, and Indian physicians attended to the needs of the sick. Meanwhile, the medical school offered courses in medicine, anatomy, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, and theology. Students and trainees were obliged to pass an examination before graduating from the school.

It was in this exciting and dynamic environment that Borzuye joined government service and established a reputation for himself as an outstanding scholar and physician. As a physician, he treated his patients free of charge. Accounts of Borzuye's life and career indicate that he stressed and engaged in a highly ethical practice of medicine. It has also been written that Khosrow sent Borzuye, who was by then probably the most eminent physician at his court, to India to study the Indian sciences and healing techniques and recruit Indian physicians to teach at the medical school in Gondishapur. This was a golden opportunity for the inquisitive and ever-searching Borzuye to study Indian medicine. India was viewed as a treasure house of ancient wisdom and knowledge and a destination for scholars, scientists, and writers from a variety of scientific fields.

It is not clear when Borzuye departed for India; how long he stayed in the country; which provinces, cities, and towns he visited; or when he returned to Persia. What sources do tell us is that he returned from India with a large collection of scientific and literary books, which were translated into Middle Persian. Borzuye also brought back the game of chess and numerous herbal plants from his trip to India. His visit to India left a profound impact on him. He studied the great works of Sanskrit literature and became engrossed with Indian mystical beliefs and practices. When he returned to Iran he brought back several collection of fables, including the *Pañcatantra* (later in Persian the *Kalila va Demna*), which he translated from Sanskrit to Middle Persian. *Kalila va Demna*, which according to François de Blois had been originally translated as *Karirak ud Damanak*, was a collection of animal stories that originated in India almost 2,000 years ago. The two central protagonists, Kalila and Demna, were clever and shrewd jackals who related humorous and racy stories about birds, beasts, and humans. The common theme of the fables was astute leadership, wise conduct of power, and the value of gaining genuine and faithful friendship. Neither the original Sanskrit nor Borzuye's translation have survived, but the eighth-century Persian writer Ibn al-Moqaffa' (721–757 CE), who was a convert from Zoroastrianism to Islam, translated the Middle Persian version of the book into Arabic. This translation, which has been praised as a masterpiece of Arabic literary prose, probably served as the basis for later Arabic and Persian translations.

Today, numerous versions and translations of the stories that Borzuye originally brought back from India are available in a variety of languages throughout the world. As he grew older, Borzuye gradually withdrew from an active public life and chose a life of detachment and solitude.

See also: *Cultures:* Education; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Khosrow I Anushiravan

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Ctesias of Knidos

Greek physician and author of *Persica* who was born in the late fifth century BCE in Cnidus in Caria in southwest Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Ctesias claimed that he had traveled to the Achaemenid court in 405 BCE and had served as the court physician during the reign of Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE). Ctesias also claimed to have been present at the Battle of Cunaxa between the Achaemenid monarch Artaxerxes II and his brother, Cyrus the Younger, in 401 BCE and to have treated the wounds that the Achaemenid king had received from his brother on the battlefield. Ctesias returned to Greece in 398 and began working on his *Persica.* The original text of *Persica* has not survived, but an abstract of the original compiled by the patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, has been preserved. Ctesias claimed that his book was based on Persian court documents and therefore was inherently superior to the *Histories* of Herodotus. Although it contains intriguing accounts regarding Iranian society and the Achaemenid

court, much of *Persica* has been rejected as a compilation of court gossip and exotic and fantastic stories. The numerous inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the book have led some scholars to reject Ctesias's claims that he had enjoyed access to Achaemenid royal records and had stayed at the Persian court for any length of time.

See also: *Prophets: Cyropaedia;* Herodotus; Xenophon

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Cyropaedia

Cyropaedia, or *Education of Cyrus*, is a partially fictional portrayal of Cyrus II the Great (r. 559/558–530 BCE), the founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, written by the Greek author Xenophon (431/430–356/354 BCE). Xenophon participated in the unsuccessful military campaign of Cyrus the Younger, the Persian prince who revolted against his brother, Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE). After the defeat and death of Cyrus the Younger on the battlefield at Cunaxa in 401, Xenophon and the 10,000 Greek mercenaries who had joined the ill-fated Persian prince returned to Greece through Asia Minor and the Black Sea.

In *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon portrays Cyrus II the Great as an ideal ruler and a model of intelligent, compassionate, benevolent, and just rule. The work is divided into eight books, but only the first book is directly related to its title, namely the education of Cyrus. In Book 2, Xenophon describes how Cyrus reorganized his army. In Book 3, the author's focus shifts to Cyrus's conquest of Armenia and Scythia, while in Books 4, 5, and 6, Xenophon details the wars between the Persians and Assyrians. In Book 7 we read about the conquest of Sardis and Babylon, and Book 8 deals with Cyrus's return to Persia after his capture of Babylon, the creation of a system of satrapies, and finally his death. In the last section, or epilogue, of *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon wages a harsh attack against the successors of Cyrus, holding them responsible for the weakness and decline of the Persian Empire, which supposedly began immediately after the death of its founder. Some have suggested that this section of the book was not written by Xenophon and was added to the original text sometime later.

Cyropaedia was not written as a work of history but rather as a historical novel. It most probably was intended to highlight the benefits of benevolent rule based on compassion and persuasion and to reject the notion that the exercise of power always requires the use of violence and force. The work suffers from numerous errors. Some of the events and personages mentioned in the narrative are fictional, and their existence cannot be validated through the available historical sources and documents. This has led scholars of ancient Greece to view *Cyropaedia* as a work of pure fiction. It is important to note, however, that much of Xenophon's description of the Persian court seems to have been based in historical reality. The Greek author may have been projecting his knowledge and observation of Cyrus the Younger to the life and character of Cyrus the Elder.

CYRUS THE GREAT IN *CYROPAEDIA*

The Greek author Xenophon (431/430–356/354/350 BCE) held the Persian king Cyrus II the Great in high regard. In his book *Cyropaedia* [Education of Cyrus], Xenophon used Cyrus as an ideal model of a just ruler. *Cyropaedia* was not written as a work of history but rather as a historical novel. It most probably intended to highlight the benefits of benevolent rule based on compassion and persuasion as opposed to an exclusive reliance on the use of violence and coercion. Though the Cyrus of *Cyropaedia* represented an ideal type, the decision by a Greek writer to choose a Persian ruler as the model of just rule was a provocative act. In sharp contrast to the majority of Greek authors who wrote about the Persian Achaemenid Empire without having known any Persians or having ever traveled in the Persian Empire, Xenophon knew the Persian prince Cyrus the Younger. Xenophon participated in Cyrus's campaign to seize the Persian throne. Cyrus the Younger and his army, which included 10,000 Greek mercenaries, were, however, defeated by the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II in the Battle of Cunaxa near Babylon in southern Iraq in 401 BCE. After Cyrus the Younger was killed on the battlefield, the Greek mercenaries returned home in a long, arduous, and hazardous journey led by Xenophon and another Greek officer. The description of Cyrus the Great in *Cyropaedia* reflects Xenophon's respect and admiration for the founder of the Persian Empire.

Throughout the centuries, *Cyropaedia* was read by many prominent world leaders as well as numerous political leaders, writers, and intellectuals, including the Roman emperor Augustus, the Italian author Machiavelli, and the American president Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, who possessed two editions of the *Cyropaedia*, advised his grandson, Francis Wayles Eppes, to study history and poetry by first reading *Cyropaedia.*

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; Cyrus the Younger; *Prophets:* Xenophon

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Ferdowsi

Ferdowsi, also known as Hakim Abolqasem Ferdowsi or Ferdowsi-ye Tusi (935/940–1019/1020 CE), is one of the greatest and most eminent Persian poets of all time. He was the author of the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the national epic of the Persian-speaking world. The *Shahnameh* is considered not only a magnum opus of Persian poetry but also a masterpiece of world literature. Written around 1000 CE, the book has played a central role in shaping the cultural identity of Greater Persia. By preserving the historical memory of the Persian-speaking people and highlighting the spirit of their heroic past, Ferdowsi has imbued his countrymen with a strong sense of pride in their cultural, artistic, and literary achievements. By assembling and marshaling the legends and folktales of ancient Persia, which were being forgotten, Ferdowsi provided his readers with a window through which they could journey back to their ancient history and encounter its complexities and richness. Through the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi also revitalized the Persian language. The scope of the book is the history of pre-Islamic dynasties of Greater Persia from the dawn of history and the appearance of the first man, Gayomard (New Persian: Kiyumars), and the establishment of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty to the invasion of Persia by Muslim Arabs and the fall of the Persian Sasanian Empire in 651 CE. Ferdowsi devoted 30 years of his life to this work, completing his colossal literary project in 1010 CE, just 10 years before his death in 1020.

Ferdowsi was born in 935 or 940 CE in the village of Bajh in the district of Tabaran of the city of Tus (present-day Mashhad) in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan. He was a *dihqan*, or a small landowner, who lived off the income generated by the rents he

collected on his lands. He was happily married to a highly educated wife. They had one daughter.

Ferdowsi was influenced by the revival of Persian language, culture, and civilization during the reign of the Samanid dynasty (r. 819–999 CE), which ruled a powerful empire that incorporated the southern regions of Central Asia, much of Afghanistan, and the entire territory of northeastern Iran. The Samanids traced their lineage to Bahram Chobin (Chubin) of the Mehran family, the great Iranian general of the late Sasanian era who seized the throne and ruled for a short time as Bahram VI in 590 CE (al-Narshakhi: 82). The Samanids were champions and patrons of Persian language and culture. During the Samanid rule, Persian language was revived through numerous scientific and literary works produced by numerous scientists, writers, scholars, and poets. Not surprisingly therefore, the Samanid era has been branded as the golden age of Persian civilization. The idea of composing the epic history of ancient Iranians in verse had already been attempted during the Samanid period by the Persian poet Daqiqi, who had completed 1,000 couplets before he was killed at a young age. Daqiqi's verses focused on the reign of Goshtasp, the legendary king of the Kayanian dynasty, and the appearance of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster), who converted Goshtasp to his new religion. In the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi paid tribute to Daqiqi.

The content of the *Shahnameh* was based on a pre-Islamic Sasanian text written in Pahlavi called *Khwadai Namag*, or *Book of Sovereigns*. Ferdowsi could not read Pahlavi, but his wife, who was highly literate and knew the pre-Islamic language, read from the text, and Ferdowsi converted the Pahlavi prose to New Persian verse. The result was a poetical masterpiece comprising thousands of couplets of rhythmic and beautifully flowing Persian poetry chronicling the national history of the Iranian people from the dawn of history to the fall of the Persian Sasanian dynasty in 651 CE. The historical narrative of the *Shahnameh* begins with the creation of the world and the reign of the first man and ruler of the world, Gayomard, and continues with detailed accounts of the reigns of Iran's legendary kings of the Pishdadian and Kayanian dynasties. Aside from the renowned kings of legendary Iran, Ferdowsi recounted the lives and struggles of such great heroes as Siyavash, Rostam, Sohrab, and Esfandiyar as well as famed heroines, including Rudabeh, Tahmineh, Farangis, Manijheh, and Katayun.

By the time Ferdowsi had completed the *Shahnameh*, the Persian Samanid dynasty had been overthrown, and power had shifted to Sultan Mahmud, the powerful ruler of the Ghaznavid dynasty who ruled a vast and powerful empire from Ghazni in present-day Afghanistan. Ferdowsi took his masterpiece to Mahmud's court

expecting royal praise and generous gifts and payments. His work was praised by Mahmud's chief minister, Abul Qassem Ahmad ibn Hassan Maymandi, who planned to express his appreciation of Ferdowsi's work by providing the poet with a handsome financial gift. The enemies of the chief minister, however, opposed the idea of showering the poet with a sizable prize and accused Ferdowsi of being a *rafezi*, or a Shia Muslim. Maymandi, who had acted as Ferdowsi's patron, was soon dismissed from his post and imprisoned, and he would only be released after Mahmud's death during the reign of his successor, Masu'd. Mahmud, who had followed the advice of his chief minister's enemies, failed to show adequate appreciation for Ferdowsi's work, paying the great poet a trifling gift of 20,000 dirhams. Humiliated and broken-hearted, the poet went to a bathhouse and, upon leaving it, requested a glass of sherbet. Upon finishing his drink, Ferdowsi divided the money he had received from Mahmud between the bathhouse owner and the man who had sold him the sherbet. Painfully aware of the brutality and vindictiveness of Mahmud, Ferdowsi escaped Ghazni for Herat, in today's northwestern Afghanistan, where he lived in hiding at the shop of a bookseller. Ferdowsi remained in hiding for six months before returning home to the city of Tus, carrying a copy of his masterpiece. He did not, however, remain in Tus. From Tus, he traveled to Tabarestan (present-day Mazandaran) on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, where he visited the court of the local king, Espahbad Shahryar ibn Sherwin, who hailed from the royal house of Bavand. The Bavands traced their lineage to Yazdegerd III, the last king of the Persian Sasanian dynasty. Espahbad Shahryar received Ferdowsi with kindness and generosity. While in Tabarestan, Ferdowsi wrote a verse lampooning the Ghaznavid ruler, Mahmud.

One account claims that Mahmud eventually began to regret his treatment of Ferdowsi and dispatched several camels loaded with indigo equal to the value of 60,000 dinars to Tus, the city where Ferdowsi resided. As the camels entered the city through one gate, however, the corpse of Ferdowsi, who had just passed away, was being transported from the city through another gate. The daughter of Ferdowsi refused to accept Mahmud's gift. According to one source, when Ferdowsi died, a religious leader in Tus opposed the burial of the poet's body in the Muslim cemetery, claiming that Ferdowsi was a follower of the heretical Shia sect of Islam. He was therefore interred in a garden that he owned outside the city gates. In 1928, Reza Shah (r. 1925–1941), the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty (r. 1925–1979), ordered the construction of a new mausoleum for Ferdowsi. The plan of the mausoleum borrowed heavily from the architectural designs of the ancient Persian Achaemenid palaces and monuments. The

construction was completed in 1934 in time for the millenary celebration of Ferdowsi, which was held in Tehran, Mashhad, and Tus and included prominent scholars from the United States, Europe, and the Near East. Today, the mausoleum is the site of pilgrimage for all Persian-speaking peoples of the world, particularly those from Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan. Down to our time, many Persian speakers continue to name their newly born children after the heroes and heroines of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, thus reaffirming their deep love and attachment for their rich and ancient culture and civilization.

NAMING CHILDREN

Naming children offers the people of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, as well as all those around the world who identify with the ancient civilization of Greater Iran, an opportunity to demonstrate their strong attachment to their ancient history and culture. Many children are named after the legendary and historical personages who figure most prominently in Persian legends, epic poems, and historical accounts. Some parents choose the names of the most famous monarchs of pre-Islamic Iran's various dynasties, including names such as Kurosh (Cyrus), Daryush (Darius), Farhad (Phraates), Mehrdad (Mithridates), Ardeshir (Artakhshir, Ardashir), Shapur, Bahram (Wahram), Piruz or Firuz (Peroz), Hormoz (Hormozd or Ohrmazd), and Khosrow (Khusrau). Other families may select the names of Greater Iran's legendary heroes and heroines, many of whom appear in the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], the epic poem of the Persian poet Hakim Abol Qassem Ferdowsi. Popular names such as Kiyumars, Siyamak, Hushang, Jamshid, Fereydun, Iraj, and Manuchehr belonged to the kings and heroes of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty and were adopted by Ferdowsi in his works. The names of heroes such as Rostam, Sohrab, Esfandiyar, Faramarz, and Bijhan are taken from Iran's legendary history, as retold by Ferdowsi, and given to male children. Legendary heroines such as Faranak, Katayun, Manijheh, Farangis, Rudabeh, Tahmineh, and Homa also appear in Ferdowsi's poems and continue to be honored and remembered in the given names of newborn girls.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Afrasiyab; Fereydun; Gayomard; Jamshid; Kay Kavus; Kay Khosrow; Rostam; Siyavash

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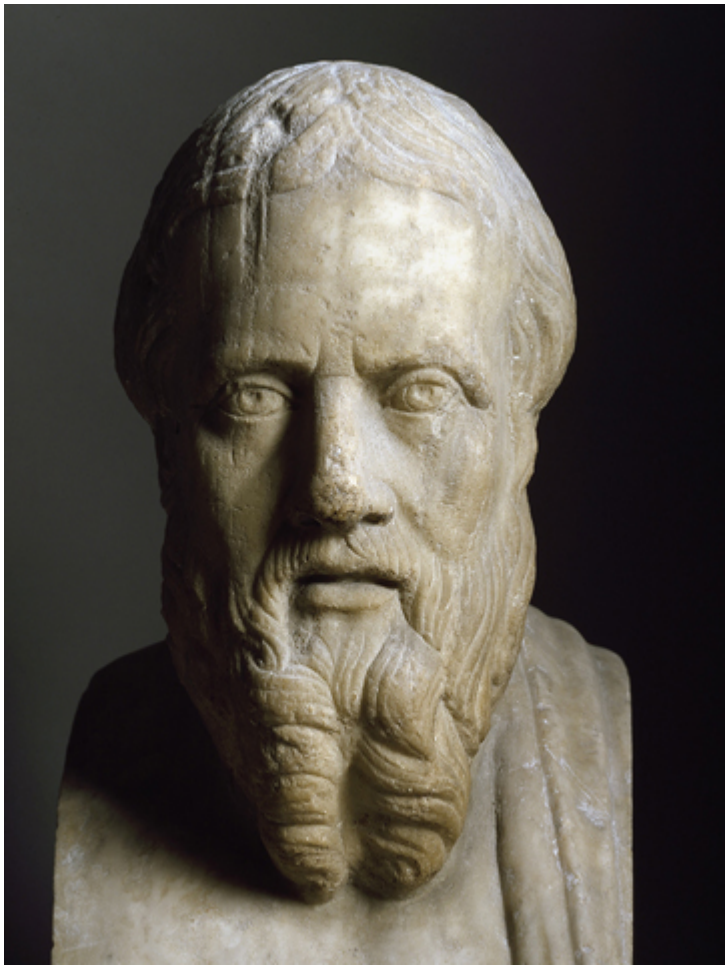
Herodotus

Greek author of the ancient work *Histories*, which focuses primarily on the rise of the Achaemenid Empire and the reigns of the Persian kings Cyrus II the Great, Cambyses II, Darius I, and Xerxes I. This narrative culminates with a detailed and highly flowery description of the failed invasion of mainland Greece by Xerxes I. Some scholars have asserted that Herodotus was an untrustworthy storyteller who either invented or embellished many of the facts and events he included in his narrative. Others have maintained that he was an exceptionally talented and creative writer who may have made bombastic claims about places, leaders, armies, and wars, but his firsthand knowledge was based in reality. Yet another group of scholars continue to hold him as one of the greatest historians of ancient Greece who utilized the most relevant facts and stories of his time to reconstruct its history.

Herodotus was born in the early part of the fifth century BCE, most probably in 484 BCE at Halicarnassus (present-day Bodrum) in Caria in today's southwestern Turkey. At the time of Herodotus's birth, southwestern Asia Minor, including Halicarnassus, was under Persian Achaemenid rule. Herodotus and his family were therefore the subjects of the Persian king. The port city, which contained a highly diverse population, enjoyed close trading ties with Egypt. Therefore, not surprisingly, throughout his writings Herodotus displayed a particular fascination with Egypt. Banished by the tyrant Lygdamis, Herodotus was forced to leave his birthplace in 454 BCE. For a time he resided on the island of Samos in the eastern Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor. He then moved to Athens. From Athens he traveled to Thurii, a newly developing Greek colony in southern Italy. He also traveled to Libya, Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, and Babylon but never visited Persia, the birthplace of the Achaemenid royal house, or any of the central and eastern provinces of the Persian Empire. He eventually returned to Greece and resided in Athens.



Bust of the Greek historian Herodotus, designated by some as the "father of history," from Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Naples. The writings of Herodotus, though valuable, are filled with fantastic stories and legendary accounts. (Leemage/Corbis)

Herodotus is best known for his *Histories*, which was completed most probably in Athens around 430 BCE. The purpose of the book was to describe the conflict between the Greeks and Persians, particularly the Persian military campaigns organized and led by the Achaemenid monarchs Darius I and Xerxes I. The actual invasion of Greece is, however, described only in the last three books of the *Histories*, which is divided into nine books. The first six books serve as a long and detailed buildup to the war, allowing the author to provide his readers with a historical background and emphasize the rise and decline of such great powers as Lydia, Media, and Persia.

The *Histories* is founded on the notion of an inherent conflict between the Greek and Persian civilizations. The Persians, whom Herodotus refers to as "barbarians," are described as a people whose

culture, religion, and customs starkly conflict with what was practiced by the Greeks. As he explains in the first sentence of his book, he embarked on his "inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds—some by Greeks, some by barbarians—may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other" (Herodotus: 1.1).

The *Histories* can be divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the reigns of Cyrus II the Great (r. 558–530 BCE), founder of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, and his son, Cambyses II (r. 530–522 BCE), as well as the seizure of power by Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), who served as an officer in the armies of Cyrus and Cambyses. The second section covers the reign of Darius I, who expanded the territorial possessions of the Persian state to the Indus River basin in the east and the southern banks of the Danube in the west. The third section focuses on a detailed account of the reign of Darius's son and successor, Xerxes I, and his invasion of Greece. Though valuable and indeed essential for the study of ancient Iran, particularly during the Median and Achaemenid periods, Herodotus's accounts are frequently filled with fantastic stories, imaginary dialogues, and blatant lies, reminding us that this otherwise valuable work should be used for historical purposes only with a great deal of caution. As Diodorus Siculus stated, "now as for the stories invented by Herodotus and certain writers on Egyptian affairs, who deliberately preferred to the truth the telling of marvelous tales and the invention of myths for the delectation of their readers, these we shall omit, and we shall set forth only what appears in the written records of the priests of Egypt and has passed our careful scrutiny" (*Diodorus Siculus:* I.69.7). Indeed, in sharp contrast to Thucydides, who was primarily concerned with tangible political and military facts, Herodotus, who seems to have had a very limited knowledge and understanding of Iranian culture and traditions, acted as a reporter who collected and recounted stories he had heard from others. As he himself wrote, "My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it—and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole" (Herodotus: 7.152).

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cambyses II; Cyrus II the Great; Darius I; Xerxes I; Primary Documents: Document 4; Document 11; Document 12; Document 19

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Kartir

Kartir (Karder) was one of the most powerful and influential Zoroastrian priests and religious officials of the Sasanian era. He played an important role in shaping the religious and political life of the Sasanian Empire during the reigns of several Sasanian kings. Kartir appears on several Sasanian rock reliefs. He also left several inscriptions of his own, which were carved next to rock reliefs depicting significant royal ceremonies or victories. These inscriptions are of great significance to historians, linguists, and scholars. They shed light on the teachings of Zoroastrianism during the early Sasanian period. They have also been used by scholars to study the grammar and structure of Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian dynasty.

Kartir's inscriptions appear at key historical and archaeological sites in the southern Iranian province of Fars. One of Kartir's inscription is at Naqsh-e Rajab (Picture of Rajab), a few miles from Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, and a short distance from Naqsh-e Rostam, where the tombs of four Achaemenid kings—Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II—are located. The inscription of Kartir at Naqsh-e Rajab is positioned next to a rock relief depicting the investiture of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. Two other inscriptions are at Naqsh-e Rostam. The first of these appears next to a relief of the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I. A second can be found below an inscription of Shapur I on the outer walls of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster). Another inscription of Kartir appears in the village of Sar Mashhad, also located in the province of Fars. This inscription is next to a rock relief, which depicts the Sasanian king of kings Bahram II killing two lions as he holds the hand of his queen. Kartir and a prince of the royal family, most probably the crown prince Bahram, stand behind the king, watching the royal hunt. The Sasanian monarch Narseh I also mentions Kartir in his inscription at Paikuli in Iraqi Kurdistan near the Iran–Iraq border.

In his inscriptions, Kartir describes his rise to power as well as his services and "achievements" as a dedicated champion of Zoroastrianism (i.e., Mazdayasnianism). He served four Sasanian kings, namely Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), Hormozd I (r. 270/272–273 CE), Bahram I (r. 273–276 CE), and Bahram II (r. 276–293 CE). Kartir rose to power and prominence during the reign of

Shapur I and was promoted to higher and more prestigious posts by Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II. Hormozd I granted him greater power and authority as well as the insignia of high office, represented by a hat and a belt. Bahram II conferred upon him the rank of a court grandee and appointed him as the chief priest and judge of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian monarch also made Kartir the "master of custom at the fires of Anahid-Ardashir and Anahid, the Lady at Istakhr," the birthplace of the Sasanian dynasty in Fars province in present-day southern Iran (Skærvø: Kartir). With strong support from his royal patron, Kartir played a central role in propagating Mazdayasnianism, supporting Zoroastrian priests and suppressing non-Zoroastrian communities, including Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Manichaeans. He played a central role in the persecution of the prophet Mani and his followers. Mani was ordered by Bahram I to present himself at the royal court, where he was questioned, denounced, and imprisoned. Mani died later in captivity.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rostam; Sar Mashhad; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III; Narseh; Shapur I; Primary Documents: Document 32

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Mani

Iranian prophet and the founder of a religion that came to be known as Manichaeism. Mani is one of the most influential figures in the history of world religions. As with the founders of other major religious movements, accounts of Mani's life are riddled with legendary tales. Manichaean accounts praised Mani as the revealer of divine truth and the model for an honorable and virtuous life, while

his enemies denounced him as an opportunistic synthesizer who borrowed from the teachings of Zoroaster, Buddha, and Jesus to patch together a religious doctrine that would be acceptable to the followers of all faiths. After Mani's imprisonment and death, his followers suffered persecution, torture, and death at the hands of their opponents, particularly those who viewed the teachings of the Iranian prophet and the activities of his followers as dangerous and a direct threat to the established order.

Mani was born in 216 CE in the village of Mardinu in southern Mesopotamia (present-day southern Iraq), near the city of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Sixty years later in 276 CE, he died in Gondishapur in present-day southwestern Iran after he had been condemned by the Zoroastrian religious leadership and the reigning Persian Sasanian king, Bahram I. Mani's father, Patik or Patek, who had hailed from the western Iranian city of Hamedan, was a member of the Jewish-Christian Elkesaites, an ascetic religious sect that practiced baptism and abstinence (al-Nadim: 582; Widengren: 965). Mani's mother, Maryam, was a member of the Arsacid family of Kamsarakan. His mother's first name indicates that she was most probably either Jewish or Christian (Widengren: 965).

Mani was a young boy when the ruling Arsacid dynasty was overthrown by Ardashir I, the founder of the Persian Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). Ardashir defeated and killed the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV, on the battlefield in 224 CE. Ardashir and his successors imposed Zoroastrianism as the state religion of their empire. At the age of 12 Mani received a revelation from a heavenly being, his "Twin" or his "Higher Ego," calling on him to leave his father's sect. His "Twin" visited him again when he was 24 years old (Widengren: 967). In the first visit Mani was ordered not to publicize his mission, but in the second encounter he was commanded to preach his religion openly (al-Nadim: 582–583). Mani began his missionary activities during the last years of the reign of Ardashir I. In 240 CE, Mani traveled to Kushan territory, where he became acquainted with the teachings of Buddhism (Widengren: 968). Two years later he returned to Iran and joined the court of Shapur I, the son of Ardashir I and the second Sasanian monarch. Mani accompanied Shapur in some of his campaigns. Mani dedicated one of his books, *Shapurakan* [Book of Shapur], to the Sasanian king. Shapur I granted Mani the right to preach his religion in the provinces of the Sasanian Empire. Mani tried to convert Shapur I to his religion but failed. Mani remained at the Sasanian court after the death of Shapur in 270/272 CE. As with Shapur, the new king, Hormozd I (r. 270/272–273 CE), allowed Mani to preach his religion anywhere in the Sasanian Empire. When Hormozd I died, however, his successor, Bahram I (r. 273–276 CE),

withdrew royal support and patronage from Mani. Mani was ordered to present himself at the Sasanian court (Widengren: 971). He had already come under attack by the Zoroastrian religious establishment and particularly by his most ardent opponent, the chief Zoroastrian priest Kartir (Karder). During his audience with Bahram I, the Sasanian king of kings told Mani that he was no longer welcome, and when Mani inquired whether he had done anything evil, the Persian monarch denounced the Iranian prophet for his ethical values and practices, particularly "the Manichaean aversion to chase and war" (Widengren: 971). Mani tried to defend himself by reminding the king of the services he had rendered, but his fate had already been sealed (Widengren: 971). At the end of his audience with Bahram I, Mani was arrested. Though incarcerated, he was allowed to meet with his followers and provide them with instruction and guidance. Mani died in jail or was executed a short time after he had been jailed.

The teachings of Mani were collected in the books he had authored. With the exception of *Shapurakan*, which was written in Middle Persian, all his other works were written in Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic. The books written in Syriac were *The Living Gospel, The Treasure of Life, Pragmateia, The Book of Mysteries, The Book of Giants*, and *The Letters.* Another book attributed to Mani was *Arzhang* or *Ardahang.* This book consisted of paintings and drawings illustrating the various aspects and stages of the spiritual teachings of Mani. Though these artistic masterpieces have been lost, they have afforded Mani the distinguished status of a master painter and artist in Persian literature and, in particular, Persian poetry.

During his life, Mani conducted most of his missionary activities within the provinces of the Sasanian Empire. His teachings reached Syria and Egypt, however, while he was still alive. Through Egypt, Manichaeism traveled to North Africa and eventually to Spain. From Syria, Manichaeism spread to Asia Minor and then to Greece, Italy, and the Roman province of Gaul, a region corresponding with present-day France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of Switzerland and northern Italy. The religion was harshly suppressed in the Roman Empire. Roman emperors such as Diocletian denounced Manichaeism as a dangerous Iranian religious movement that could undermine the internal stability of the Roman state. After the Roman Empire imposed Christianity as its state religion, the Christian church joined the campaign to suppress Manichaeism and persecute its adherents. One of the fathers of the Latin Church, Saint Augustine, who for a time had converted to Manichaeism, condemned the Iranian religion as a dangerous heretical movement that bred confusion and doubt in the minds of Christians. Manichaeism also met the same dreadful fate under Islamic rule, which overthrew the Sasanian Empire in 651 CE.

During the Abbasid rule (r. 750–1258) in particular, the followers of Mani were denounced as *zindiks* (heretics), and many were subjected to imprisonment, torture, and murder. The terrorized few who survived this harsh persecution either fled or went underground. Manichaeism enjoyed its greatest success in Central Asia, although it faced strong opposition from Buddhists. Through Sogdian merchants, who played a central role in organizing trade caravans along the Silk Road, Manichaeism spread to the major urban centers of the region, including Samarqand, Bokhara, and Tashkent. Sometime during the last four decades of the eighth century CE, the Turkic Uyghur kingdom adopted Manichaeism as its state religion. When Uyghur power declined in the ninth century, however, Central Asian Manichaeism lost its most steadfast and resolute supporter. In China, Manichaeism lost to Buddhism and was forced to go underground, while in the western regions of Central Asia, Islamic rule forced Manichaeism into extinction.

MANICHAEANS ON THE SILK ROAD

After the death of the Iranian prophet Mani in 276 CE, his followers, who were persecuted by the Zoroastrian religious establishment, spread the teachings of their leader beyond the boundaries of the Sasanian Empire. In the east, Manichaean missionaries traveled on the famed Silk Road and found converts among Sogdians, who played an important role in linking the economies of China and Central Asia with the markets of Persia, Mesopotamia, and Rome. The Sogdian merchants had a strong presence in several major urban centers of China, including the capital, Chang'an (modern-day Xian), which also served as the starting point for those traveling on the Silk Road, and Luoyang. Both of these cities were sacked during the rebellion of An Lu-Shan, which began in 752. In an attempt to recover its lost cities, the Tang dynasty of China appealed for assistance from the Turkic Uighurs, who ruled a vast empire based in Mongolia.

In 762, after capturing Luoyang and Chang'an, the Uighur ruler known by his title of *khagan* became acquainted and enthralled with Manichaeism as practiced by the Sogdians. His fascination led him to request that Manichaean missionaries be sent to his court after he had returned home. Shortly after he had returned to his capital, four Manichaean missionaries arrived at the Uighur court. The Uighur *khagan* held a long meeting with the four Manichaean missionaries, keeping his newly arrived guests at the court overnight. The next morning at dawn, he proclaimed his intention to convert to Manichaeism. In a ceremony imbued with Iranian cultural influence and dominated by Persian symbols of authority and kingship, the Uighur *khagan* following the example of Sasanian monarchs, dressed himself in a purple cloak, sat on a golden throne, and placed a golden diadem on his head. Thus, Buddhism was replaced by Manichaeism as the state religion of the Uighur Empire. After the Uighurs were defeated and overthrown by the Kyrgyz in 840, Manichaeism continued to thrive in the small Uighur states of Gansu and Turfan. Manichaeism survived in Central Asia until the Mongol invasion of the 13th century.

The followers of Mani were organized into two distinct and separate classes. The first were the Elect, who constituted the religion's priestly caste. They were prohibited from eating meat, drinking wine, and engaging in sexual intercourse. The second comprised the Listeners, or the ordinary followers of the religion, who were obligated to observe certain rules; they could own property, engage in sexual intercourse, and marry but were not allowed to have children.

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Naqsh-e Rajab; *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III; Hormozd I; Shapur I; *Peoples:* Sasanian Empire; *Prophets:* Kartir

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Mazdak

Mazdak was an Iranian religious leader and thinker who advocated the creation of a just society based on equality and peace. The dates for his birth and death are unknown. Some scholars have maintained that he was killed sometime between 524 and 528 CE. Mazdak lived during the tumultuous reigns of the Sasanian monarchs Peroz (r. 459–484 CE) and Kavad I (r. 488–496 and 499–531 CE). In the fifth century CE, the eastern borders of the Sasanian Empire were breached

by the Hephthalites, a nomadic confederation from Central Asia. The Sasanian monarch Bahram V (r. 421–439 CE) tried to slow down the Hephthalite invaders by building towers to protect the northeastern provinces of his empire. His successor, Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE), spent much of his reign preventing the Hephthalites from entering the northeastern provinces of his empire. Despite their best efforts, the threat from these nomadic invasions carried on into the reign of Peroz, who fought the Hephthalites three times. In the first campaign, he was captured by the Hephthalites and forced to pay a substantial ransom for his release. In the second encounter, the Sasanian monarch was forced to leave his son, Kavad, as a hostage with the Hephthalites. In 484 CE, to avenge the humiliation he had suffered and against the best advice of his courtiers, Peroz attacked the Hephthalites. This time, the Sasanian monarch was defeated and killed on the battlefield in present-day northern Afghanistan. Their victory over the Sasanian army and the death of the Persian king forced the Sasanian dynasty to sue for peace and pay an annual tribute. The reign of Peroz also corresponded with a long period of drought and famine. As rivers and water wells dried up, the peasant masses suffered. The humiliating defeats at the hands of the Hephthalites undermined the power and legitimacy of the Sasanian state. After the death of Peroz, his brother Balash (Valakhsh) succeeded on the throne, but he was deposed after a short reign of four years in 488. The next Sasanian monarch, Kavad I, who was the son of Peroz, believed in the necessity of social and economic reforms. Kavad was also convinced that the enormous power of the empire's ruling classes, namely the landed nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood, had to be curtailed. It is not surprising therefore that Kavad was attracted to the teachings of Mazdak, a member of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy who preached against greed, arrogance, and unfettered power.

Mazdak followed a reform movement within Zoroastrianism that preached peace and justice and opposed violence and bloodshed. According to his interpretation of Zoroastrianism, the triumph of good over evil required human beings to strive for compassion, brotherhood, and equality and abandon wickedness, malice, competition, and conflict, as manifested by greed and the drive to accumulate property and women. According to Mazdak, evil and suffering in the world originated from the human fixation on satisfying self-centered desires without any regard for the hardships and needs that might be faced by other human beings. Liberating the human soul from evil and creating a just and peaceful society free of competition and violence required human beings to abandon this greed and selfishness and instead share with one another the existing resources of their society.

Mazdak's ideas and Kavad's support for them posed a direct threat to the established privileges of the ruling classes, particularly the Persian nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. Their opposition was powerful enough to depose Kavad I in 496 and force him to seek refuge with the Hephthalites, among whom he once had lived as a hostage. In 499, Kavad managed to convince the Hephthalites to help him raise an army and regain his throne. Although Kavad returned to power, he realized that his authority would not be fully secure until he appeased the nobles and priests who opposed Mazdak. The ruling dynasty was itself divided from within between pro-Mazdak and anti-Mazdak factions. Among potential heirs to the throne, Mazdak and his followers favored Kavus, the older son of Kavad I, who sympathized with the ideas and objectives of their movement. Kavad's younger son, Khosrow, who strongly opposed Mazdak, was the preferred candidate of the anti-Mazdak nobility and the Zoroastrian priesthood. After the death of Kavad I, his son Khosrow seized the Sasanian throne. Khosrow suppressed Mazdak and his supporters, known as the Mazdakites. The religious leader was denounced, detained, and executed. According to one source, Khosrow I summoned a group of high Zoroastrian priests to his court. He then sent a message to Mazdak, "requiring him to reply to the questions" posed by "this priestly assembly on pain of death," to which Mazdak "assented" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bahman Yasht, 194n2). Mazdak was "asked ten religious questions, but was unable to answer one," so Khosrow "put him to death immediately" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bahman Yasht, 194n2). In his book *Siyar al-Muluk*, also known as *Siyasat Nameh*, the Persian vizier and author of the Saljuq era Nizam al-Mulk wrote that before seizing the throne, Khosrow invited his father, Kavad I, and Mazdak as well as many followers of the religious reformer to a lavish banquet, feigning that he would declare his conversion to their beliefs. As the Mazdakites arrived at the reception, however, they were seized and executed by palace guards, who buried them in a polo field, with their heads downward in the earth and their feet protruding out of the dirt (Nizam al-Mulk: 257–258). After all the invited Mazdakites had been eliminated, Khosrow then invited his father and Mazdak for a walk. Upon entering the field and seeing the buried bodies of Mazdakites with their planted feet erect in the air, Khosrow turned to Mazdak and said, "the army which you command cannot deserve a better reward than this. You thought that you could steal peoples' property and women and carry off kingship from our dynasty" (Nizam al-Mulk: 258). Mazdak was then detained and subsequently buried to his chest in a pit with only his head and neck above the ground. He remained in the same position until he died (Nizam al-Mulk: 258). In defending the actions of Khosrow, Pahlavi texts denounced the

reform-minded religious leader as "the accursed Mazdak son of Bamdad" who was opposed to Zoroastrianism and had caused disturbance "among those in the religion of God" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bahman Yasht, I.6). The murder of Mazdak, who had gained popularity among the masses, was followed by a campaign of terror and repression. Throughout the empire Mazdakites were imprisoned, and many were executed. The movement was forced underground, but it did not die. Despite the harsh repression it suffered at the hands of the Sasanian state, the Mazdakite movement survived and enjoyed a revival after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the introduction of Islam in 651. The Mazdakites played an important role in the rebellion of Abu Muslim, the charismatic general and commander who overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 750 and installed the Abbasids on the throne. Several popular movements that erupted in Iran and Central Asia after the murder of Abu Muslim by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur were organized by the Mazdakites. Among the most popular of these was the rebellion of Sanbad (Sinbad), a commander in Abu Muslim's army who revolted against the authority of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad in 755 (Nizam al-Mulk: 260). Another was the rebellion of "the Veiled Prophet," al-Muqanna', in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan. The Iranian legendary hero Babak Khoramdin, who led a popular movement against the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad between 817 and 837 from his stronghold in the northwestern province of Azerbaijan, was also inspired by the revolutionary ideas of Mazdak.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Kavad I; Khosrow I Anushiravan; Peroz

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Xenophon

Greek officer, author, and historian who made numerous references to the Persian Achaemenid Empire in his writings. Xenophon (431/430–356/354 BCE) was born in Athens into an aristocratic family. A student of the Greek philosopher Socrates, Xenophon trained as a cavalry officer. He joined a Greek mercenary army, which then attached itself to an expedition led by the Persian prince Cyrus the Younger to seize the throne of the Achaemenid Empire from Cyrus's older brother, the ruling Persian monarch Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE). In 401 BCE, Cyrus was defeated and killed on the battlefield of Cunaxa in present-day southern Iraq. After the death of Cyrus and the execution of his commanders, Xenophon emerged as one of the leaders of the Greek contingent. Under his leadership, the Greeks who had fought with Cyrus returned to Greece in a long march through the territory of the Persian Empire. Traveling through Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, the mercenaries reached Byzantium. Back in Athens, Xenophon became involved in a conflict with the ruling oligarchs of the city, who forced him into exile. He lived for a time in Sparta and later on an estate near Olympia before moving to western Peloponnese. Xenophon eventually returned to Athens and lived there until his death in 354 BCE.

In his *Anabasis* [Upcountry March], or *Persian Expedition*, Xenophon wrote about the revolt of Cyrus the Younger against his brother, Artaxerxes II, and the long march of 10,000 Greek mercenaries to the interior of the Persian state. Xenophon also described the retreat of the Greek mercenaries after the defeat and death of Cyrus the Younger. Though intriguing in some of its facts and details, Xenophon's account of the march does not provide the reader with any insight into the political and cultural life of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Xenophon also authored *Cyropaedia*, or *Education of Cyrus*, which provides a highly romanticized description of Cyrus II the Great, founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. *Cyropaedia* is not a historical work. It does not provide the reader with any facts regarding the life and achievements of Cyrus, nor does it offer any insight into the political organization of the Persian Empire during the reign of its founder. It is therefore not surprising that many scholars have viewed the book as a work of pure fiction. Interestingly enough, however, much of Xenophon's description of the Persian court seems to have been based in historical reality. This has led some to conclude

that the Greek author was projecting his knowledge and observations of Cyrus the Younger to the life of Cyrus the Elder. In the last section of *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon waged a harsh attack against the successors of Cyrus, holding them responsible for the weakness and decline of the Persian Empire. Some have suggested that this diatribe was not written by Xenophon and was added to the original text sometime later.

See also: *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Cyrus II the Great; Cyrus the Younger; *Prophets: Cyropaedia;* Primary Documents: Document 11; Document 19

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Zarathustra (Zoroaster)

Zarathustra (Old Iranian: Zarathushtra; Greek: Zoroaster; New Persian: Zardosht) was an Iranian religious leader, teacher, and reformer. He is one of the most influential figures in the history of religious thought in the world. The concepts of good and evil, life after death, heaven and hell, and the last judgment as well as the doctrine of the millennia and the idea of a savior who will appear to rescue his people from ignorance, oppression, and suffering were introduced to the world for the first time through Zarathustra's teachings. These ideas left a profound impact on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as on Greek and Roman religious practices and thought. Zoroastrianism, the religion that was founded based on his teachings, "may well have been the fundamental set of ideas that helped shape the world's major faiths as we know them today" (Watson: 113).

Despite Zarathustra's significance in the history of ideas, we do not know the date of his birth. Zoroastrian tradition as well as several authors of the Islamic era maintained that the Iranian prophet lived "258 years before Alexander." This date has been rejected as erroneous by a majority of experts. One of the best-known scholars of Zoroastrianism, Mary Boyce, set the date of Zarathustra's birth and lifetime for a period between 1700 and 1000 BCE, while other scholars prefer either the seventh or sixth century BCE. Neither do we

know the birthplace of Zarathustra. The language of the Zoroastrian scriptures, as it appears in the *Avesta*, the holy book and the major text of Zoroastrianism, linguistically belongs to a family of eastern Iranian languages. This has led many scholars to conclude that Zarathustra was probably born somewhere in Central Asia.

Zarathustra was born into the Spitaman clan. In Zoroastrian tradition, his father was Pourushaspa (Porushasp), who was himself a son of Paitirasp (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.1). Zarathustra's mother was Dughda/Dugdow/Dughdhova, the Avestan word for "daughter" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.10, 144n8). She was the daughter of Frahimrava/Fereahimruvana (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.10). The people among whom Zarathustra was born and raised were chiefly animal herders. As such, they lived in constant fear of attacks from raiding nomads who plundered and slaughtered their livestock.

According to Zoroastrian tradition, Zarathustra became a priest at a young age. At the age of 30, he received a revelation to teach his fellow men to seek the path of truth by worshipping the creator of the world and the wise lord, Ahura Mazda. During the first decade of his ministry, Zarathustra did not manage to convert anyone but his cousin. His teachings attracted opposition from religious and secular elites, who harassed and insulted the young preacher, forcing him to flee persecution and search for a new home. Zarathustra was eventually received by Vishtaspa (Goshtasp), a king of the Kayanian dynasty, who accepted his teachings. Vishtaspa, along with his queen Hutaosa, eventually converted to Zoroastrianism and agreed to act as Zarathustra's patron and protector. Court officials in the service of Vishtaspa followed their royal master's example and accepted the teachings of the Iranian prophet. The conversion of the royal family and their associated government ministers was a turning point in the life and career of Zarathustra.

The Zoroastrian scriptures praise King Vishtaspa for his wisdom and benevolence. Zarathustra remained at the court of Vishtaspa and established close political and familial ties with members of the royal court. For example, one of his daughters, Pouruchista, married Jamasp, a high official at the royal court. The Iranian prophet himself married several times. These marriages produced three daughters and three sons (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.5). The names of Zarathustra's daughters appear as Freni, Thriti, and Pouruchista in the *Avesta* (Farvardin Yasht, 139) and as Fren, Srit, and Poruchist in *Bundahishn* (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.5). Zarathustra's first son was Isadvastra, whose name appears as Isadvastar in the Zoroastrian religious book *Bundahishn* (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Yasna, 23; Bundahishn, 32.5). The second son was Urvatadnara (*The Zend-Avesta,*

Part I: Vendidad, 2; *The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 98), who appears in the *Bundahishn* as Auravatadnar. The name of Zarathustra's third son appears as Havrechitra in the *Avesta* and as Khurshedchihr in the *Bundahishn* (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 98, 204n1). According to Zoroastrian tradition, Zarathustra's first son, Isadvastar, became the Mobad of Mobads (literally the Priest of the Priests or the High Priest) and passed away in the 100th year of the religion (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.5). The second son, Auravatadnar, "was an agriculturalist," while the third son, Khurshedchihr, became "a warrior" and "a commander" in "the army of Peshyotanu [Peshutan/ Pashutan], son of King Vishtaspa [Goshtasp], and dwells in Kangdezh" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.5). The occupations of Zarathustra's three sons correspond with the three recognized social estates of ancient Iran: the priests, the warriors, and the agriculturalists.

Zarathustra continued with his missionary activities until his death at the age of 77. According to several Persian sources of the Islamic era, Zarathustra was murdered by a Turanian general at the age of 77 while praying in a fire temple at Balkh, a city located in present-day northern Afghanistan.

In the Gathas, the oldest remaining section of the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy book, Zoroaster speaks to the great god Ahura Mazda and appeals to him for support and guidance. Ahura Mazda is represented as the all-seeing, wholly wise, and benevolent creator of Earth and the entire universe. Ahura means "lord," and Mazda means either "wisdom" or "wise." Ahura Mazda therefore means "the wise lord" or "lord wisdom." The teachings of Zarathustra, as reflected in the Gathas, represent a form of monotheism, a religious perspective that emphasizes the supremacy of one god. In fact, Zarathustra does not mention any other gods. This omission has led some scholars to conclude that Zarathustra had discarded Indo-Iranian gods, including Mithra and Anahita, as deities worthy of veneration. However, in other sections of the Zoroastrian scripture, which were probably written many centuries after Zarathustra, Anahita and Mithra appear as powerful deities worthy of worship (*yazatas*). For example, among the *Avesta*'s 21 Yashts, or hymns, each venerating and paying homage to a particular Zoroastrian deity, Mihr Yasht is dedicated to Mithra, the protector of oaths, contracts, and covenants who was created by the supreme god Ahura Mazda to protect wide cattle pastures and waters. In Mihr Yasht, Mithra appears as "the lord of wide pastures, who has a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes, a *yazata* invoked by his own name" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Mihr Yasht, 1). Ahura Mazda informs the prophet Zarathustra that he had created "Mithra, the lord of wide pastures as worthy of sacrifice, as worthy of prayer as myself,

Ahura Mazda" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Mihr Yasht, 1). Another Yasht, namely Aban Yasht, was devoted to veneration of the goddess of waters, Aredvi Sura Anahita, who was praised as "the wide-expanding, the health-giving," "the life-increasing," "the herd-increasing," "the fold-increasing," "the wealth-increasing," and "the country-increasing" deity created by the great god Ahura Mazda (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 1). Anahita was credited with making "the womb of all females pure for bringing forth," making "all females bring forth in safety," and putting "milk into the breasts of all females in the right measure and the right quality" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 2).

FERDOWSI ON ZARATHUSTRA

The life and career of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) has fascinated scholars through the ages. Historians, writers, and poets praised him as a great prophet, poet, and healer who after many years of teaching and preaching converted the Kayanian monarch Vishtaspa (Goshtasp) to his religion. The Persian epic poet Ferdowsi demonstrated his profound admiration and reverence for Zarathustra in his masterpiece, the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings], which was composed over 1,000 years ago.

Zardosht [Zarathustra] the prophet of the Most High, appeared in the land
And he came before the Shah and instructed him
And he went out in all the land
And showed the people a new faith.
And he purged Iran of the power of Ahriman [the evil spirit].
He reared throughout the realm a tree with beautiful foliage,
And men rested beneath its branches.
And whoever ate of its leaves became learned
in all that regards the life to come,
but whoever ate of the branches
became perfect in wisdom and faith.
And Zardosht gave men the Zend Avesta,
And he bade them obey its precepts
If they would attain everlasting life.

Source: Reprinted in Paul Kriwaczek, *In Search of Zarathustra* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 10.

According to Zarathustra, the great god Ahura Mazda is the kind and benevolent creator of the universe, Earth, and everything that is good and beautiful. Like any other prophet, however, Zarathustra is forced to explain the source of evil on Earth. If Ahura Mazda had created everything that was good, who was then responsible for the existence of evil? Given that Ahura Mazda, who is good, cannot be responsible for creating evil, Zoroastrianism attributes the existence of

evil to a self-created demonic force or evil spirit, Angra Mainyu (i.e., Ahriman), who exists solely for the purpose of corrupting and destroying Ahura Mazda's creations. Thus, while Ahura Mazda creates life, happiness, and prosperity, Angra Mainyu introduces death, deprivation, and decay, and while Ahura Mazda stands for truth and justice, Angra Mainyu defends falsehood, death, and destruction. The struggle between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu and the battle between good and evil emerge as the core of Zoroaster's teachings. The prophet stands with Ahura Mazda and the forces of truth, justice, and compassion, teaching and fighting against Angra Mainyu and his army of demonic forces and evildoers.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Goshtasp; *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; *Avesta;* Gathas; Primary Documents: Document 1; Document 2; Document 3; Document 32

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Religion, Religious Beliefs, and Gods and Goddesses

OVERVIEW ESSAY

This chapter includes entries on the religions and religious belief systems of pre-Islamic Iran. Ancient Iran was home to a variety of religious movements and traditions. The prophet of ancient Iran, Zarathustra (Zoroaster), who lived in great antiquity, is one of the most influential figures in the history of religious thought in the world. The set of teachings to which he and his followers introduced the world left a profound impact on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as on Greek and Roman religious practices and thought. The concepts of good and evil, life after death, heaven and hell, and the last judgment, as well as the doctrine of the millennia and the idea of a savior who would appear to rescue his people from ignorance, oppression, and suffering, were all introduced to the world for the first time by the prophet Zarathustra. Zoroastrianism, the religion that was founded on his teachings, introduced fundamental ideas and beliefs that helped shape the world's major faiths as we know them today.

Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion; that is, it recognizes one supreme god. In his Gathas, which constitute the oldest section of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy scripture, Zoroaster taught that Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) was the great god who had created the universe, the heavens, and Earth. Ahura Mazda was also the source of order in the cosmos. Ahura means "lord," and Mazda means either "wisdom" or "wise." Thus, Ahura Mazda translates as either "the wise lord" or "the lord of wisdom."

Although it was a monotheistic religion, Zoroastrianism nonetheless incorporated some of the ancient belief systems of early Iranians. Mithra, the god of covenants and later the sun god, as well as Anahita (Anahid), the goddess of waters and fertility, were prominent figures in the early Iranian pantheon of gods, and they continued to appear in Zoroastrian tradition. At times they, and even Ahura Mazda, were anthropomorphized, that is, depicted as human beings. For

example, at the Sasanian-era rock reliefs at Taq-e Bostan near the city of Kermanshah, the Persian monarch Khosrow II Parvez is shown flanked by two human figures. On the right is the great god Ahura Mazda, who is handing the new Persian king the diadem of power. To the left of the king stands Anahita, who is also depicted in human form. Temples thought to be dedicated to Anahita have been unearthed at various archaeological sites, including the Sasanian site at Bishapur. Anahita also served as the patron deity of the Sasanian royal family, who had been guardians of the temple of Anahita in the province of Fars before assuming the reins of imperial power. In Zoroastrian texts, Mithra is identified as the protector of oaths, contracts, and covenants who was created by the supreme god Ahura Mazda to protect wide cattle pastures and waters. Inscriptions from Achaemenid times mention Mithra but do not identify him with the sun. By the time the Persian Sasanians seized power in the third century CE, Mithra had emerged as the sun god, who was at times anthropomorphized. For example, on the rock reliefs at Taq-e Bostan, he is shown wearing a crown festooned by 12 rays of sun, holding a *barsom* bundle, and standing on a lotus flower as he oversees the investiture of the Sasanian monarch Ardashir II.

According to Zoroaster, Ahura Mazda created the world through his holy spirit and active principle, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six divine entities. Known as Amesha Spentas (Amshaspands), these entities represent the attributes of Ahura Mazda in the material and spiritual worlds. The Amesha Spentas (holy immortals) were brought into existence by Ahura Mazda to help him create the seven holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire. Ahura Mazda himself was the creator and the protector of man. Ahura Mazda and the holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the six holy immortals formed the Zoroastrian Heptad (Unit of Seven). In later Zoroastrian texts, each of the holy immortals is matched against an evil spirit who intends to attack and destroy divine creations. In addition to being part of the Zoroastrian Heptad, each of the holy immortals was recognized and venerated separately. Each had a month named for it and was celebrated with a festival of its own.

Through the centuries, Zoroaster's ideas and teachings gave rise to religious creeds and movements, which tried to use the teachings of Zoroastrianism as a means of reforming their society. The Iranian prophet Mani (216–276 CE), who is recognized as the founder of Manichaeism, and the religious reformer Mazdak, who appeared during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Kavad I (r. 488–496 and 499–531 CE), were both directly influenced by the teachings of Zoroaster. Another important response to the rise and prominence of

Zoroastrianism was a heterodox religious movement called Zurvanism, which was dedicated to the worship of Zurvan, the god of infinite time. The adherents of Zurvanism worshipped the god of infinite time as the supreme architect of the universe. They believed that Zurvan was the father and creator of both Ahura Mazda, the god of goodness and light, and his opponent, the demonic Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, the spirit of destruction and evil.

Adur

The Middle Persian word *adur* means "fire." The word appears as "Atar" in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. The words for fire in New Persian are *azar* and *atash.* Adur was the name of the ninth month of the year in the Zoroastrian calendar. Azar is also the name of the ninth month of the year in the Iranian calendar. Fire was considered by Zoroastrians as one of the holiest of all God's creations and "the son of Ahura Mazda": "To Atar, the son of Ahura Mazda; to the Glory and to the Weal, made by Mazda; to the Glory of the Aryas, made by Mazda; to the awful Glory of the Kavis [kings of the Kayanian dynasty], Made by Mazda" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Sirozah, 1.9).

Three holy fires were continuously maintained during the late Sasanian period: Adur Borzen Mihr (Azar Borzin Mehr), Adur Farnbag (Azar Farnbagh), and Adur Gushnasp (Azar Goshnasp). During the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE), each of the three great sacred fires of Iran was identified with one of Sasanian society's three social estates: priests, warriors, and the members of the third estate, namely the peasant farmers and artisans. Adur Borzen Mihr was designated as the fire of the third estate, or the laboring classes. Adur Borzen Mihr translates as "exalted is Mihr [Mithra]." No reliable date is known for its origins, nor is any trustworthy information available regarding its exact location. In the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn,* King Vishtaspa of the Kayanian dynasty is credited with establishing the sacred fire of Borzen Mihr on Mount Rivand in Khorasan (*Bundahishn:* 17.8). Other sources state that the fire was founded sometime in the late fifth or early fourth century BCE, and its location was the province of Khorasan, either at Mount Rivand or "Raevant in the vicinity of Lake Sovar" (Jackson: 100) near the present-day city of Neyshabur (Nishapur) or at Mount Mehr between the cities of Sabzevar and Shahrud. The Persian epic poet Daqiqi also traced the origins of Adur Borzen Mihr to the Kayanian monarch Goshtasp, who built a temple for this fire after he had converted to Zoroastrianism. Daqiqi also asserted that an ancient cypress tree graced the front of

the temple and had been planted there by the prophet Zarathustra himself. The sacred fire remained an important center for pilgrimage and worship in ancient Iran until the arrival of Islam in the seventh century CE. It is not clear when or how Adur Borzen Mihr was destroyed.

The second sacred fire of ancient Iran was Adur Farnbag. The origins of this fire most probably date back to the reign of the Sasanian dynasty. In the *Bundahishn,* King Vishtaspa of the Kayanian dynasty is credited with moving the sacred fire of Farnbag from Chorasmia or Khwarazm, on the lower reaches of the Oxus River south of the Aral Sea, to Kabul (in present-day Afghanistan) (*Bundahishn:* 17.6). Zoroastrian religious tradition claimed that the Adur Farnbag was originally established in Chorasmia, the region on the lower banks of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) south of the Aral Sea and was later brought to Fars in southern Iran during the reign of the legendary Kayanian monarch Goshtasp (the *Avesta*'s Vishtaspa). As noted above, each of the three great sacred fires of ancient Iran was identified with a particular social estate. Adur Farnbag was designated as the fire of the first of these estates, the priests and the men of religion. Adur Farnbag too remained an important center for pilgrimage and worship in ancient Iran until the arrival of Islam in the seventh century CE. After the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the arrival of Islam, the Zoroastrian priests who were responsible for protecting Adur Farnbag divided the fire into two, taking one portion to Karian and another to Fasa, both located in the province of Fars in southern Iran. Eventually the fire was transported to a village near the city of Yazd in central Iran. The Adur Farnbag was eventually extinguished, but the empty temple that contained it continues to be held in great reverence by the Zoroastrians of Iran.

The third sacred fire of ancient Iran, which was particularly important during the late Sasanian period, was Adur Gushnasp. In the *Bundahishn,* the Kayanian monarch Kay Khosrow of the Kayanian dynasty is credited with establishing the sacred fire of Gushnasp on Asnavand Mountain (*Bundahishn:* 17.7). Sometime during the reign of the Sasanian dynasty, a temple was built especially for Adur Gushnasp at a majestic site known today as Takht-e Soleyman (Throne of Solomon) in Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran, between Bijar and Shahindejh northeast of Takab. It is not clear when and from where the sacred fire was brought to Azerbaijan. Neither do we know the exact date for construction of the fire temple and the formidable walls that surrounded it. Other details, however, are known regarding Adur Gushnasp. Because the Sasanian kings themselves belonged to the warrior caste, Adur Gushnasp was considered to be the sacred fire of the royal family. After ascending the throne, Sasanian kings displayed

their devotion and humility by making a pilgrimage to the fire on foot. They also bestowed lavish gifts upon the fire temple. The importance of the fire reached new heights during the fifth and sixth centuries. Before departing for a military campaign against the Byzantine Empire, the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE) visited the fire to pay homage. When the victorious king of kings returned from his successful campaign, he displayed his devotion once again by bequeathing to the sanctuary an enormous quantity of spoils he had collected from the enemy. The Sasanian king Khosrow II Parvez (r. 590–628 CE) also visited the fire to pray for victory against the Byzantine armies, and upon his return he too donated to Adur Gushnasp a handsome share of the treasures he had seized during the campaign.

Ruins of a building with a Zoroastrian tower of silence in the background, in Yazd, central Iran. Zoroastrianism, founded by the ancient Iranian prophet Zarathustra/ Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), was one of the most influential religions of the ancient world. The teachings of Zoroaster had a profound impact on Greek and Roman religious thought, as well as Judaism and Christianity. (Antonella865/ Dreamstime.com)

In 623 CE, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius invaded Sasanian territory and sacked Adur Gushnasp, destroying its altars, setting the building afire, and slaying every living creature there. The sacred fire, however, was carried to safety and later reinstalled. After the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651 CE, the temple complex continued to function for several more centuries before its fire was extinguished at an unknown date.

Located on the rim of a volcanic lake, Takht-e Soleyman, the

sanctuary of Adur Gushnasp, remains an important archaeological site in the present-day northwestern Iranian province of west Azerbaijan. The original name of the area where the sanctuary is located was Shiz. The present-day name, Takht-e Soleyman, apparently dates back to the 14th century. The earliest settlement on the site dates back to the Achaemenid period (550–330 BCE). During the Arsacid period (247/238 BCE–224 CE), a small fortification was built at the northern edge of the lake. The site emerged as a very important religious sanctuary during the Sasanian period (224–651 CE). Presumably much of the improvement to the site was carried out during the reigns of the Sasanian monarchs Kavad I and his son Khosrow I Anushiravan. Khosrow had played an important role as a crown prince in suppressing the Mazdakite revolutionary movement and led the effort to reinforce Zoroastrianism as the state religion of the Sasanian Empire.

The site was not abandoned immediately after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the introduction of Islam. However, with the disappearance of the Sasanian monarchy, which had acted as the principal patron and protector of Zoroastrianism, and with the spread of Islam, the site was eventually abandoned. The holy fire was removed from the sanctuary, although we do not know exactly when or under what circumstances. During the Il Khanid period in the 13th century the sanctuary was rebuilt, but during the Timurid period in the late 14th and early 15th centuries the site was abandoned once again. In July 2003, Takht-e Soleyman and the citadel containing the ruins of the ancient fire temple were recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site.

See also: *K&Q, Sasanian:* Bahram V; Khosrow I Anushiravan; Khosrow II Parvez

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Adur Borzen Mihr. *See* Adur

Adur Farnbag. *See* Adur

Adur Gushnasp. *See* Adur

Aeshma

The incarnation of wrath and anger, Aeshma is the *daeva* (demon) of anger, violence, and revenge in Zoroastrianism. His name appears as Kheshm in Middle Persian and Khashm in New Persian. In the *Avesta,*

Aeshma "of the murderous spear" is mentioned as a member of the army of the evil spirit Ahriman together with such demons as those of evil thought, lethargy, lust, greed, death, old age, malice, spite, fever, decay, etc. (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 19.43). In the battle of good, represented by the great god Ahura Mazda, and evil, as embodied by Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), Aeshma acts as an ally of Ahriman "and the impersonation of invasion," robbery, and pillaging, "the chief scourge" of early Zoroastrians (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* xix). The *yazata* Sraosha, embodying religious obedience, discipline, and devotion, is Aeshma's principal opponent. The responsibility for chasing "the evil-doing" Aeshma and forcing it to flee, however, is assigned to Mithra, "the lord of wide pastures" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Mihr Yasht, 93, 134).

See also: *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; *Avesta*

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Ahriman

Ahriman is the evil spirit in Zoroastrianism. In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, the evil spirit is called Angra Mainyu, which has been translated as "destructive mind" or "destructive spirit." The Middle Persian equivalent of Angra Mainyu is Ahriman. The oldest section of the Zoroastrian holy scripture, the Gathas, which was presumably composed by Zarathustra himself, espouses monotheism, or a belief in one god. The name of this god is Ahura Mazda (lord

wisdom or wise lord). Ahura Mazda is the supreme architect of the universe and everything that is good and beautiful. Zarathustra did not mention the evil spirit or Angra Mainyu by name but alluded to the existence of good and evil as the world's first primeval spirits (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 30.3, 45.2). The good is bountiful, and the evil is harmful and destructive.

In later sections of the *Avesta,* Angra Mainyu/Ahriman and his army of demons appear as the principal adversaries of the supreme god Ahura Mazda and the holy and bounteous immortals (Amesha Spentas) who have assisted the wise lord in creating and protecting the world and everything that is beautiful. The Amesha Spentas were brought into existence by Ahura Mazda to help him create the holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire. Ahura Mazda himself is the creator and the protector of man. Ahura Mazda and his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the six holy immortals formed the Zoroastrian Heptad (Unit of Seven). In the *Avesta,* the names of these six holy immortals appear as (1) Vohu Manah (Pahlavi: Vahman; New Persian: Bahman), the good purpose/good thought/good mind, the protector of cattle; (2) Asha Vahishta (Pahlavi: Ardvahisht; New Persian: Ordibehesht), the best truth/best order/best righteousness, the protector of fire; (3) Khshathra Vairya (Pahlavi: Shahrevar; New Persian: Shahrivar), the desirable dominion/power, the protector of the sky; (4) Spenta Armaiti (Pahlavi: Spendarmad; New Persian: Esfand), the holy or beneficent devotion, the protector of Earth; (5) Haurvatat (Pahlavi: Hordad; New Persian: Khordad), the wholeness/health/protection, the protector of water; and (6) Ameretat (Pahlavi: Amurdad; New Persian: Amordad or Mordad), immortality, the protector of plants. Each of the holy immortals is matched against a *daeva* (demon) who intends to attack and destroy divine creations. The six chief demons who oppose the Amesha Spentas in the same relation as Angra Mainyu to Spenta Mainyu are Indra, who opposes Asha Vahishta and "turns men's hearts from good works"; Sauru, who opposes Khshathra Vairya and "presides over bad government"; Naunghaithya, who opposes Spenta Armaiti and functions as "the demon of discontent"; Taura and Zairi, who "oppose Haurvatat and Ameretat and poison the waters and the plants"; and Akem-mano, or "Bad Thought, who opposes Vohu Manah, Good Thought" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 10.9, 139n1). In addition to these six demons, an additional army of destructive demons serve Angra Mainyu/Ahriman. These include the demons of lethargy, wrath, lust, greed, death, malice, lying, spite, etc. (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 19.43).

Angra Mainyu/Ahriman himself resides in a world of total darkness and functions as the "Daeva of the Daevas," or demon of the

demons, the leader of all demonic and destructive forces (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 19.6.43). Just as Ahura Mazda creates good spirits, Ahriman counters by giving life to evil beings. Ahura Mazda brings light, while Ahriman creates darkness. Ahura Mazda creates life; Ahriman introduces death and destruction. Ahura Mazda creates water; Ahriman the drought. The Greek author Plutarch wrote that "the great majority of the wisest men hold this opinion" that "there are two gods, rivals as it were, the one the Artificer of good and the other of evil," and "there are also those who call the better one a god and the other a daemon, as for example, Zoroaster the sage," who "called the one Oromazes [Ohrmazd/Ahura Mazda] and the other Areimanius [Angra Mainyu/Ahriman]; and he further declared that among all the things perceptible to the senses, Oromazes may best be compared to light, and Areimanius, conversely, to darkness and ignorance, and midway between the two is Mithras; for this reason the Persians give to Mithras the name of Mediator" (*Plutarch's Moralia:* Isis and Osiris, 46).

The *Avesta* remained silent on the origins of evil in the world. The absence of an explanation regarding the origins of evil raised a fundamental question: If Ahura Mazda created everything that was good and beautiful in the world, who was then responsible for the existence of evil? One way to explain the existence of evil was to argue that Ahura Mazda was the father and creator of both light and darkness, the so-called twin brothers, namely the good Spenta Mainyu and the evil Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman. Another approach was to maintain that Ahura Mazda was only the creator of light, life, and all good things, but he could not be held responsible for the existence of evil because darkness, death, and destruction were the creations of Angra Mainyu/Ahriman. The problem with this second approach is that it presents the all-powerful Ahura Mazda as an equal adversary of Angra Mainyu/Ahriman, a demonic power who possesses the ability to challenge and undermine the authority and actions of the great god. Second, if Ahura Mazda represents the good and Angra Mainyu/Ahriman the bad and they are primeval spirits who came into existence as a pair, one may legitimately ask, what about the power that gave birth to them? In other words, if Ahura Mazda did not create the evil spirit and if Angra Mainyu/Ahriman is the evil opponent of Ahura Mazda, we may understandably wonder as to the identity of the parent or parents of these twins.

Attempting to explain the origins of Ahriman presented Zoroastrianism with a fundamental challenge. If Ahura Mazda created everything good, how could he create and give birth to the evil spirit? And if Ahura Mazda was not the creator of Ahriman, what was then the source of evil in the world? Zurvanism, the popular Iranian

religious movement that worshipped Zurvan, the god of infinite time, tried to resolve this problem by claiming that Ahura Mazda (i.e., the light) and Ahriman (i.e., the darkness) were both the creations of Zurvan (infinite time). Ahura Mazda and Ahriman were twins or brothers who were born from the same womb. Ahura Mazda was born from Zurvan's bountiful spirit, while Ahriman was born out of Zurvan's doubt about the efficacy of his creative action. From these origins Ahura Mazda emerged as the creator of light and all that was beautiful and good, while Ahriman emerged as the creator of everything evil and destructive.

A cult of Ahriman developed in ancient Iran. According to Plutarch, the Iranian prophet Zoroaster had taught that "men should make votive offerings and thank-offerings to Oromazes, and averting and mourning offerings to Areimanius" by pounding "in a mortar a certain plant called omomi, and at the same time invoking Hades and darkness; then they mix it with the blood of a wolf that has been sacrificed, and carry it out and cast it into a place where the sun never shines" (*Plutarch's Moralia:* Isis and Osiris, 46). Zoroastrian religious texts, such as *Dinkard,* also admit to the existence of a community of sorcerers who worshipped Ahriman.

No mention of Angra Mainyu/Ahriman exists in the inscriptions of the Persian Achaemenid kings. Neither do we have any depiction of Angra Mainyu/Ahriman on the Achaemenid rock reliefs. Ahriman was, however, depicted in human form on Sasanian rock reliefs. For example, the investiture relief of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian monarchy, at Naqsh-e Rostam in Iran's Fars province shows the Sasanian king of kings receiving the diadem of royalty from the great god Ahura Mazda. The rock relief also depicts Ahura Mazda as having crushed Ahriman under the hooves of his horse. Though portrayed as a human, Ahriman has distinctly demonic features, including animal ears and snakes in his hair. Like Ahura Mazda, the Sasanian king also sits on his horse, which has trampled on the last king of the Arsacid dynasty, Artabanus IV, whom Ardashir I defeated and killed in 224 CE. The figures in the relief signify the divine nature of the Sasanian king and imply that he traced his origins to Ahura Mazda. Not surprisingly therefore, the god and the king look exactly the same and are only distinguished by their distinct crowns, while the defeated enemy, who represents the evil on Earth, mirrors the demonic Ahriman and meets the fate deserving of the evil spirit.

See also: *Prophets:* Zarathustra (Zoroaster); *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; *Avesta*

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Ahura Mazda

Ahura Mazda, who appears in the Old Persian inscriptions of ancient Iran's Achaemenid dynasts as Aura Mazda and in the Middle Persian inscriptions of Iran's Sasanian monarchs as Ohrmazd, is an ancient Iranian god as well as the great divinity and the supreme god of Zoroastrianism. In his Gathas, which constitute the oldest section of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy scripture, the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) taught that Ahura Mazda should be worshipped as the all-seeing, wholly wise, and benevolent creator of the universe and of heaven and Earth and as the source of order in the cosmos. Ahura means "lord," and Mazda means either "wisdom" or "wise." Thus, Ahura Mazda means either "the wise lord" or "lord wisdom." It is not clear whether Ahura Mazda was recognized and worshipped as the supreme god before Zarathustra. Some scholars have maintained that before the emergence of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda had been elevated as the wise lord and the supreme deity among some Iranian communities. Scholars of ancient Iran have noted that Zarathustra's Ahura Mazda had an Indian counterpart in the Hindu god Asura, who appears in the sacred Hindu hymns of *Rig Veda.*

As the creator of the world, Ahura Mazda stood at the center of the universe. The natural world as well as humanity owed their origins and design to the great god and the six holy immortals who assisted him in the act of creating everything that was good and beautiful.

These immortals were not independent divine beings or angels but rather various aspects of Ahura Mazda. Zarathustra teaches that the great god, Ahura Mazda, created the world through his holy spirit and active principle, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six divine entities. Known as Amesha Spentas (Amshaspands), they represent the attributes of Ahura Mazda in the material and spiritual worlds. The Amesha Spentas were brought into existence by Ahura Mazda to help him create the seven holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire. Ahura Mazda himself was the creator and the protector of man. Ahura Mazda and the holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the six holy immortals, formed the Zoroastrian Heptad (Unit of Seven). In the Zoroastrian holy book the *Avesta,* the names of these six holy immortals appear as (1) Vohu Manah (Middle Persian: Vahman; New Persian: Bahman), the good purpose/good thought/good mind, the protector of cattle; (2) Asha Vahishta (Middle Persian: Ardvahisht; New Persian: Ordibehesht), the best truth/best order/best righteousness, the protector of fire; (3) Khshathra Vairya (Middle Persian: Shahrevar; New Persian: Shahrivar), the desirable dominion/power, the protector of the sky; (4) Spenta Armaiti (Middle Persian: Spendarmad; New Persian: Esfand), the holy or beneficent devotion, the protector of Earth; (5) Haurvatat (Middle Persian: Hordad; New Persian: Khordad), the wholeness/health/protection, the protector of water; and (6) Ameretat (Middle Persian: Amurdad; New Persian: Amordad or Mordad), immortality, the protector of plants. In later Zoroastrian texts each of the holy immortals is matched against an evil spirit who intends to attack and destroy divine creations. Each of the holy immortals was venerated separately. Each had a month named for it and was celebrated with a festival of its own.

The role of Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrian teachings posed a fundamental dilemma. If Ahura Mazda had created this world and all that is good in it, who then was responsible for the existence of evil? Zoroastrianism responded to this dilemma by teaching that although the wise lord Ahura Mazda was the creator of life and the cosmos, he had a powerful adversary in the evil spirit Angra Mainyu/Ahriman, who represented evil in the world. Ahura Mazda was the upholder of Asha (truth and justice) but was opposed by Angra Mainyu/Ahriman, who acted as the defender and protector of Druj (the lie). Ahura Mazda fought to defeat and destroy Angra Mainyu/Ahriman to build a world that was wholly good. Thus, the world was divided into two opposing and warring camps, which were engaged in an eternal conflict. Human beings were free to choose Ahura Mazda and the forces of truth or to choose Ahriman and the forces of the lie, or untruth.

Zoroastrianism rejected the idea that mankind was helpless at the

hands of a predetermined fate. On the contrary, human beings were free to shape their fate and future. Those who chose Ahura Mazda and the path of truth over the lie, those who battled against the forces of evil and wickedness, thought the good thoughts, spoke the good words, and acted the good acts, were rewarded with eternal peace, joy, and a happy afterlife, while those who followed the evil spirit, Ahriman, and the forces of destruction and the lie were punished by a life of pain, torment, and suffering here on Earth and in the afterlife. Zoroastrianism carried the notion of the struggle between good and evil to a final battle in which Ahriman and the forces of darkness will be defeated and destroyed by Ahura Mazda and his army of good. With this victory by Ahura Mazda, the world would be renewed as an eternal home for the just and compassionate.

Scholars have debated whether in calling on his followers to worship Ahura Mazda, Zarathustra was introducing a form of monotheism (belief in one god). In his Gathas, or personal hymns and meditations, the Iranian prophet rejected the worship of other gods as a manifestation of evil thinking, but he also described Ahura Mazda as the source of all that is good but not as the creator of evil. The existence of evil was traced in the *Avesta* to the all-powerful and uncreated Angra Mainyu (Ahriman).

Ahura Mazda was mentioned as the supreme god by several Persian Achaemenid kings in their royal inscriptions. In his inscriptions, the Persian king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) praised Ahura Mazda as the great god who had created Earth, given happiness to humanity, and bestowed kingship upon him as the ruler of a vast and powerful empire. The Persian monarch presented himself as the representative of Ahura Mazda on Earth and as a lawgiver who stood and fought for truth against the forces of evil and the lie. Several successors of Darius repeated the same statement, but they also expressed their devotion to other Iranian gods such as Mithra, the god of covenants and oaths as well as the sun god, and Anahita, the goddess of waters.

Ahura Mazda appears as Ohrmazd in the inscriptions of the Sasanian dynasty, which seized power in 224 CE after Ardashir I overthrew the last Arsacid monarch, Artabanus IV. For example, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, called his father, Ardashir I, and himself Mazda-worshipping kings. Ohrmazd also appeared on Sasanian rock reliefs, particularly those depicting royal investiture, as a majestic and beautifully dressed king who either stood or sat mounted on horseback opposite the Sasanian king. Under the hooves of Ohrmazd's horse, Ahriman was depicted as a defeated, trampled, and crushed foe.

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas

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Airyanem Vaejah

Airyanem Vaejah or Airyena Vaejah, "the expanse" or "the territory" of "the Aryans/Iranians," is the name for the ancient homeland of the Iranian people and the "holy land of Zoroastrianism" in the *Avesta* (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 3n3). The name appears as Eranvej in Middle Persian and Iranvij in New Persian.

In the Vendidad, the lord wisdom, Ahura Mazda, speaks to the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) about the 16 perfect lands he had created. The first of these is Airyanem Vaejah by the river "Daitya" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 1.3). The evil spirit, Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), who "is all death" and opposes Ahura Mazda and his creations, countercreates "the serpent in the river" and harsh winters (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 1.3). Thus, far from being the perfect land created by Ahura Mazda, Airyanem Vaejah has "ten winter months" and only "two summer months; and those are cold for the waters, cold for the earth," and "cold for the trees" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 1.4). Pahlavi texts such as the *Bundahishn* provide additional information on the frigid conditions in Eranvej: "And on the auspicious day Ataro of the month Din the winter arrives, with much cold, at Airan-vej; and until the end, in the auspicious month Spendarmad, winter advances through the whole world" (*Bundahishn:* 15.11). We are also told that the river Daitik, which originated from "Airan-vej" and went out "through the hill-country," had more noxious creatures than any other river (*Bundahishn:* 20.13). Despite its harsh setting, which is blamed on the evil spirit, in the Zoroastrian tradition Airyanem Vaejah retains its role

as the homeland of the Avestan people. It is in Airyanem Vaejah on the bank of the river Daraga that Zarathustra's father Pourushaspa (Pahlavi: Porushasp) resides (*Bundahishn:* 20.32), and it is in Airyanem Vaejah that Zarathustra is born (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.13–14). Zarathustra introduces his religion in Airyanem Vaejah (*Bundahishn:* 32.3). Airyanem Vaejah is also the scene of legendary events, including the first creations of the first animal couple, "one pair of every single species," as well as the first man, Gayomard (*Bundahishn:* 14.4). Ahura Mazda and his prophet Zarathustra also pay their respects to powerful deities in Airyanem Vaejah. Thus, the great god and his messenger offer a sacrifice to the goddess of waters, Aredvi Sura Anahita, in Airyanem Vaejah (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Yasht, 5.17, 104).

Airyanem Vaejah as a concept and an actual geographical region has been subjected to a great deal of debate and speculation. Some scholars have dismissed Airyanem Vaejah as an actual geographical entity, arguing instead that it was a purely mythological and ideological construct. Other scholars, however, have attempted to associate Airyanem Vaejah with a concrete geographical region. The description of Airyanem Vaejah in the Vendidad has led some scholars to conclude that the land was located somewhere in the Russian steppes, while others have maintained that it was located somewhere in the southern regions of Central Asia or present-day northern Afghanistan in close vicinity to Sogdiana, Margiana, and Bactria, which were mentioned as the second, third, and fourth good lands and countries created by Ahura Mazda. Some went even further and argued that Airyanem Vaejah was Chorasmia (Khwarazm) on the lower reaches of the Oxus River south of the Aral Sea. Sometime during the Sasanian period (r. 224–651 CE), Airyanem Vaejah (i.e., Eranvej) became associated with northwestern Iran. Thus, the ninth-century Zoroastrian book *Bundahishn* identified Eranvej with Azerbaijan (Ataro-patakan/Adarbaigan) (*Bundahishn:* 29.12).

See also: *Religion: Avesta;* Vendidad

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Ameretat

According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, the great god Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit and active agent, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Ameshaspands). Ameretat (immortality), which appears as Amurdad in Middle Persian and Amordad or Mordad in New Persian, is one of the six holy immortals. Ameretat was created by Ahura Mazda as the guardian and protector of plants. The Amesha Spentas represented the six attributes of the great god in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy entities into existence to assist him with the creation of six holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire, and their protection from destruction by the evil spirit and its demonic allies. Ahura Mazda and his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the Amesha Spentas constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or the Heptad. Each holy immortal represents an attribute of its creator, Ahura Mazda. As holy immortals who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for protecting an element of the world order. Each of the holy immortals is "a *yazata,* that is, a being to be worshipped in his own right, with prayers, sacrifices, and hymns of praise; and they should be duly invoked, each by his own name, for the special help which they have been created to give, as Zoroaster himself invokes them in the Gāthās" (Boyce: Ameša Spenta). Mordad (Amordad) is also the name of the

fifth month of the year in the Iranian calendar.

See also: *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Religion:* Adur; Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Amesha Spentas

According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, the great god Ahura Mazda created the world through his holy spirit and active agent, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Amshaspands). These holy entities represent the attributes of Ahura Mazda in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy immortals into existence to help him with the creation and protection of the seven creations, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire. Ahura Mazda himself through Spenta Mainyu is directly responsible for the creation of man. Ahura Mazda and his Spenta Mainyu, together with the six Amesha Spentas, constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or Heptad. Each of the Amesha Spentas represents an attribute of its creator, the great and benevolent god Ahura Mazda. As divine immortals who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for protecting an element of the world order.

The Amesha Spentas are Vohu Manah, Asha Vahishta, Khshathra Vairya, Spenta Armaiti, Haurvatat, Ameretat, and Spenta Mainyu. Vohu Manah, which appears as Vahman in Middle Persian and Bahman in New Persian, is associated with good mind, good thought, and good purpose. Vohu Manah is the guardian and protector of cattle. Asha Vahishta, which appears as Ardvahisht in Middle Persian and Ordibehesht in New Persian, is associated with best order, best truth, and best righteousness. Asha Vahishta is the guardian and protector of fire. Khshathra Vairya, which appears as Shahrevar in Middle Persian and Shahrivar in New Persian, is associated with desirable dominion and power. Khshathra Vairya is the guardian and

protector of the sky. Spenta Armaiti, which appears as Spendarmad in Middle Persian and Esfand in New Persian, is associated with holy or beneficent devotion. Spenta Armaiti is the guardian and protector of Earth. Haurvatat, which appears as Hordad in Middle Persian and Khordad in New Persian, is associated with wholeness and health. Haurvatat is the guardian and protector of water. Ameretat, which appears as Amurdad in Middle Persian and Amordad or Mordad in New Persian, is associated with long life and immortality. Ameretat is the guardian and protector of plants. Ahura Mazda, through his holy spirit Spenta Mainyu, is associated with the creation of man.

Each of the holy immortals is matched against a *daeva* (demon) who intends to attack and destroy divine creations. The six chief demons who oppose the Amesha Spentas in the same relation as Angra Mainyu to Spenta Mainyu are Indra, who opposes Asha Vahishta and "turns men's hearts from good works"; Sauru, who opposes Khshathra Vairya and "presides over bad government"; Naunghaithya, who opposes Spenta Armaiti and functions as "the demon of discontent"; Taura and Zairi, who "oppose Haurvatat and Ameretat and poison the waters and the plants"; and Akemmano, or "Bad Thought, who opposes Vohu Manah, Good Thought" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 10.9, 139n1). Each of the six Amesha Spentas was venerated separately, and each had a month named for it and was celebrated with a festival of its own (Boyce: Ameša Spenta).

See also: *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Ameretat; Asha and Asha Vahishta; Haurvatat; Khshathra Vairya; Spenta Armaiti; Vohu Manah

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Anahita

Anahita is the name of the ancient Iranian goddess of waters and fertility. Her name, which appears as Anahid in Middle Persian, means

"the immaculate one." At times she is depicted as a "maid fair of body most strong, tall-formed, high-girded, pure, nobly born of a glorious race, wearing shoes up to the ankle, with all sorts of ornaments and radiant" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 64, 78). Anahita's sacred animals are the dove and the peacock. The Aban Yasht, or the fifth hymn in the Zoroastrian holy book the *Avesta,* is dedicated to the veneration of "the great goddess of waters," the celebrated Aredvi Sura Anahita (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 52). She is "the heavenly spring from which all waters on the earth flow down" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 52). The great god Ahura Mazda speaks to his prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) and calls upon him to offer a sacrifice to Anahita, "the wide-expanding [as she comes down to all places] and health giving, who hates the daevas [demons] and obeys the laws of Ahura, who is worthy of sacrifice in the material world, worthy of prayer in the material world; the self-increasing and holy, the herd-increasing and holy, the fold-increasing and holy, the wealth-increasing and holy, the country-increasing and holy" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 1). Anahita is credited for making "the seed of all males pure," for making "the womb of all females pure for bringing forth," for making "all females bring forth in safety," and for putting "milk into the breasts of all females in the right measure and the right quality" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 2). The Aban Yasht also enumerates the legendary heroes and villains of Iran who worshipped Anahita. These include Haoshyangha (Hoshang, Hushang), Yima (Jamshid), Azhi Dahaka (Zahhak), Thraetaona (Fereydun), Keresaspa (Garshasp), Franghrasyan (Afrasiyab), Kava Usa (Kay Kavus), Husravah (Kay Khosrow), Tusa (Tus), Gamaspa (Jamasp), Vishtaspa (Goshtasp), Zairivairi (Zarir), and Zarathustra himself (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Aban Yasht, 17–84). The hymn to the river goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita reads:

> (1) Aredvi Sura Anahita, increasing corn, just, increasing herds, just, increasing possessions, just. … (3) immense, far-famed, who is as great in her immensity as all these waters which flow forth upon the earth; who, mighty, flows forth from Mount Hukairya upon the sea Vourukasha—all the edges of the sea Vourukasha are turbulent, all the middle is turbulent, as Aredvi Sura Anahita pours forth upon them. … (5) the outflow of that one sea will pour forth over all the seven regions. She pours down her waters summer and winter alike. She purifies the waters, she purifies the seed of males, the womb of females, the milk of females. … (132) Through this sacrifice, through this prayer … descend again, O Aredvi Sura Anahita, from those stars to the Ahura-created earth, to the worshipping priest with cupped hands overflowing, for help to the

> libation bringer. (Boyce: *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* 33)

Anahita appears in the inscription of the Persian Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE) at Susa, the winter capital of the Achaemenid dynasty. The inscription reads:

> Saith Artaxerxes the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries, King in this earth, son of Darius the King, of Darius (who was) son of Artaxerxes the King, of Artaxerxes (who was) son of Xerxes the King, of Xerxes (who was) son of Darius the King, of Darius (who was) son of Darius the King, of Darius (who was) son of Hystaspes, An Achaemenian: This palace Darius my great-great-grandfather built; under Artaxerxes my grandfather it was burned; by the favor of Ahuramazda, Anaitis [Anahita], and Mithras, this palace I built. May Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras protect me from all evil, and that which I have built may they not shatter nor harm. Saith Artaxerxes the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda this is the palace, which I built in my lifetime as a pleasant retreat. May Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras protect me from all evil, and my building. (Kent: 154–155)

The cult of Anahita was apparently widespread in Iran and Armenia during the reigns of the Achaemenid, Seleucid, and Arsacid dynasties. According to Strabo, "the sacred rites of the Persians, one and all, are held in honor by both the Medes and the Armenians; but those of Anaitis [Anahita] are held in exceptional honor by the Armenians, who have built temples in her honor in different places" (Strabo: 11.14.15–16). The author of *Parthian Stations,* Isidore of Charax, wrote that in Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan in western Iran), "the metropolis of Media," there was a temple "sacred to Anaitis" [Anahita], where sacrifices were offered (Isidore of Charax: 7). Another temple in nearby Kangavar also may have been dedicated to the veneration of the goddess of waters. According to the scholar Mary Boyce, the "Arsacids followed the example set by their predecessors in venerating Aramazd-Mihr-Anāhid as their chief helpers; and the woman's name Āb-Nāhīd ('Anāhīd of water') is first attested in the Parthian period" (Boyce: Anāhid).

In 224 CE, Ardashir, a vassal of the Arsacid dynasty in the Istakhr district of Fars province, revolted and killed Artabanus IV, the last monarch of the Arsacid dynasty. Ardashir founded the Sasanian dynasty. According to the Muslim historian Tabari, Sasan, the ancestor of the new ruling family, was the guardian of a fire temple dedicated to the veneration of Anahid (Tabari: 2.580). It is not surprising therefore that throughout the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–

651 CE), Anahid was venerated as the patron deity of the Sasanian kings, although as followers of Zoroastrianism they worshipped Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) as the supreme god. In displaying their devotion to Anahid, the Sasanians named their daughters after the water goddess. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran, the second Sasanian monarch, Shapur I, stated that he had founded "a fire called Khosro-Aduranahid [Khosrow Adur Anahid] by name for the soul of our daughter Aduranahid, queen of queens, to perpetuate her name" (Frye: 372). Below Shapur's inscription on the walls of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) at Naqsh-e Rostam, another inscription, this one by the powerful Zoroastrian priest Kartir, enumerated the honors that the Sasanian kings had bestowed upon him. Among these, it is stated that the Sasanian monarch Bahram II made him "Master of Ceremonials and Warden of the Fires of Anahid-Ardashir and Anahid the Lady at Istakhr" (Boyce: *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* 112–113). In his inscription at Paikuli in northern Iraq, the Sasanian monarch Narseh (r. 293–302 CE) credited his seizure of power to the assistance from and support of Anahid. Anahid also appeared on Narseh's rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam. The relief, which depicts the investiture of Narseh, shows Anahid offering the diadem of kingship to the Sasanian monarch (Herrmann and Curtis: Sasanian Rock Reliefs). Anahid also appeared at a large arched grotto at Taq-e Bostan near Kermanshah in western Iran. The back wall of this grotto is divided into upper and lower panels. The upper panel depicts the investiture of Khosrow II Parvez (the Victorious), who ruled from 591 to 628 CE. The Sasanian monarch stands in the middle, flanked on the right by the great god Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) who is handing the Persian king the diadem of power. To the left of the king stands Anahid, the goddess of waters and the patron deity of the Sasanian royal family. It seems that in ancient Iran numerous natural settings created by rivers, lakes, and springs were converted into sanctuaries for veneration of Anahid, the "Lady of the Land." One of these is most probably the shrine of Bibi Shahrbanu in Ray, south of present-day Tehran, the capital of Iran. Popular belief holds that the shrine contains the body of Shahrbanu, a daughter of Yazdegerd III (r. 632–651 CE), the last king of the Persian Sasanian dynasty. According to legendary accounts, after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the death of Yazdegerd III, his daughter, the Persian princess Shahrbanu, was captured by the invading Arab armies and transported to Medina in Hejaz in western Arabia, where she married Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and the second son of Fatima, the prophet's daughter, and Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the messenger of Islam. After Hussein was killed on the plains of Karbala in southern Iraq in 680, Shahrbanu returned to Iran, but the enemies

of her husband pursued her all the way to Ray. In a last desperate effort to save her life, the Persian princess sought God's protection, but instead of shouting "Yallahu" (Oh God) she mistakenly uttered "Ya Kuh" (Oh Mountain). In response to this plea the mountain suddenly opened, allowing her to conceal herself among the rocks (Boyce: Bībī Šahrbānū). Sometime later a tomb was erected on the site, which emerged as a major shrine for pilgrims through many centuries down to our own time. No historical evidence exists to confirm the validity of the Shahrbanu legend and her marriage to the third Shia imam, Hussein. The scholar Mary Boyce has maintained that the shrine originated as a pre-Islamic sanctuary dedicated to the veneration of the "Zoroastrian divinity" Anahid, who carried the title of Banu, or "Lady," and "her shrine at Ray may well have been devoted to her" as Shahrbanu, "Lady of the Land" (i.e., Iran) (Boyce: Bībī Šahrbānū). Boyce also believes that "one of the most beloved mountain shrines of the Zoroastrians of Yazd set beside a living spring and a great confluence of watercourses, is devoted to Bānū-Pārs, 'The Lady of Persia'" (Boyce: Anāhid). This sanctuary "appears to have been devoted originally to Anāhīd 'the Lady,' being rededicated in Islamic times, like the shrine of Bībī Šahrbānū near Ray, to a legendary Sasanian princess" (Boyce: Bībī Šahrbānū; Boyce: Anāhid).

Rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars in southern Iran depicts the investiture of the Sasanian monarch Narseh by the goddess Anahita (Middle Persian: Anahid). A water divinity and river goddess, Anahita was one of the most popular deities of ancient Iran. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bibi Shahrbanu; *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Prophets:* Zarathustra (Zoroaster); *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; *Avesta;* Primary Documents: Document 37

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Angra Mainyu. *See* Ahriman

Asha and Asha Vahishta

Asha is the word for "truth" in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. In Old Persian, the language of the Persian Achaemenid dynasts, the word appears as *Arta. Asha* is frequently mentioned in the *Avesta* as an opposite of *druj,* or "lie." Some scholars have suggested that *asha* can be also translated as moral order or righteousness. In the Gathas, the personal hymns and meditations of Zarathustra, which are dedicated to the veneration and praise of the great god and the wise lord Ahura Mazda, Asha is addressed by Ahura Mazda as the personified righteous order, an aspect of the god himself.

In the *Avesta,* Asha Vahishta (best truth, best righteousness, best order) appears as one of the Amesha Spentas, or the holy and bounteous immortals created by Ahura Mazda to assist him with the creation of the world. According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Middle Persian: Ameshaspands). The Amesha Spentas represent the attributes of the great god in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy entities into existence to assist him with the creation and protection of the seven holy elements, namely

the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire. Ahura Mazda himself protects the seventh creation, namely human beings. Asha Vahishta, which appears as Ardvahisht in Middle Persian and Ordibehesht in New Persian, is one of the holy immortals created by Ahura Mazda to protect fire. Fire is the son of Ahura Mazda and the greatest of all holy creations (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Sirozah, 9).

The great god and his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the Amesha Spentas constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or the Heptad. Each holy immortal represents an attribute of its creator, Ahura Mazda. As beneficent beings who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for protecting an element of the world order. Each of the holy immortals is a *yazata,* a being worthy of worship in its own right. The Amesha Spentas represent the power and majesty of their creator, Ahura Mazda. They also personify the best physical and moral qualities of divine creation. But as Ahura Mazda the good god is opposed by Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) the evil spirit, so too each of the Amesha Spentas is opposed by a demonic counterpart (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 1.27). In this battle of opposites, Asha, the truth, was opposed by Druj, the lie, one of the most powerful demonic creations of the evil spirit.

As already mentioned, the creation of Asha Vahishta or Ardvahisht (best truth) is directly linked to the care and protection of fire. The relation between truth and fire was not, however, an arbitrary association. Ancient Iranians believed in a fire ordeal. For example, in the story of the Iranian legendary hero Siyavash, the fire ordeal plays an important role in demonstrating the innocence of the protagonist when he is accused of a grave offense. Sudabeh, the queen of Iran, wife of Kay Kavus, and stepmother of Siyavash, falls in love with her stepson and attempts to seduce the young prince by inviting him to her quarters at the palace. When Siyavash rejects her sexual advances, Sudabeh becomes enraged and accuses him of raping her. Outraged by his queen's accusation, the king orders Siyavash to undergo the test of demonstrating his innocence, which requires the accused to ride a horse through a large bonfire created by setting alight an enormous mountain of firewood and timber. Ancient Iranian tradition maintained that if the accused was innocent, he would emerge out of the fire unscathed. If he was guilty, however, the fire would consume him as he rode through it. Siyavash accepts the challenge. He mounts his horse, rides through the bonfire, and survives the ordeal unharmed.

See also: *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Religion:* Adur; Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Ashi Vanguhi

Ashi Vanguhi is the female deity or goddess of fortune and wealth in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. Her name means "the good Ashi." Ashi Vanguhi personifies piety. She is also venerated together with "Parendi the goddess of Treasures" as "the source of all the good and riches that are connected with piety" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 270). In the *Avesta,* the Ard Yasht is dedicated to this female deity, who is described as the daughter of the great god Ahura Mazda and a sister of Amesha Spentas, the holy immortals who had been brought into existence by Ahura Mazda to assist him with the creation of the world (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ashi Yasht, 17.2). She is the "shining, high, tall-formed, well worth of sacrifice, with a loud-sounding chariot, strong, well-fare giving, healing, with fullness of intellect, and powerful" deity to whom the prophet Zarathustra offers a sacrifice in Airyanem Vaejah, the homeland of the Iranian people in great antiquity (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ashi Yasht, 17.1). Some of the prodigious personages of the *Avesta* who were transformed into great kings in Iran's legendary history, including Haoshyangha (Hoshang/Hushang), Yima (Jamshid), Thraetaona (Fereydun), Husravah (Kay Khosrow), and Vishtaspa (Goshtasp), also offer a sacrifice to Ashi Vanguhi (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Yasht, 17.24, 28, 33, 41, 49, 270).

See also: *Religion:* Amesha Spentas; *Avesta*

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Astvihad

The demon of death and dissolution in Zoroastrianism. Astvihad serves the evil spirit Ahriman in his battles against the god of good, the wise lord Ahura Mazda. When the evil spirit decides to corrupt and destroy the creations of the lord wisdom, Ahura Mazda, particularly the first man, Gayomard, he resorts to Astvihad. The evil spirit "thought the creatures of Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) were all rendered useless [powerless] except Gayomard" and unleashed Astvihad with 1,000 deaths, bringing demons (*devs*) against Gayomard (*Bundahishn:* 3.21). Gayomard's appointed time with death, however, had not come, and Astvihad could not obtain any means of murdering the first man.

See also: *Religion: Avesta;* Vendidad

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Avesta

The *Avesta,* the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, constitutes the principal source for our understanding of the teachings of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster), who lived and preached in great antiquity. According to the Zoroastrian tradition, the 21 books of the

Avesta, which were created by the great god Ahura Mazda, were introduced by the prophet Zarathustra to King Vishtaspa of the Kayanian dynasty. Two copies of the *Avesta* were written down and deposited, but a large segment of the original text was destroyed and scattered when Alexander the Macedon invaded and conquered the Persian Achaemenid Empire. During the reign of the Arsacid dynasty (247/238 BCE–224 CE), King Valakhsh (Vologeses) ordered the remaining fragments of the holy book to be collected, but this goal was not completed until the establishment of the Sasanian dynasty by Ardashir I in 224 CE. Ardashir I (r. 224–239/240 CE) ordered the high priest Tansar (Tōsar) to complete the work of collecting the fragments of the *Avesta* that had commenced under the Arsacids. During the reign of Ardashir's son and successor Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), a search was conducted for all the scientific documents that had been dispersed by Alexander with the goal of reintegrating them into the main text of the *Avesta.* Under Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE), the *Avesta* was thoroughly reviewed and revised to ensure that its original and orthodox core had not been infected by the existing heresies and deviations. Finally, during the reign of Khosrow I (r. 531–579 CE), "a revision of the Pahlavi translation took place" (Kellens: "Avesta i"). What remains of the *Avesta* today is a very small section of the original text.

The *Avesta* consists of several sections, which include the Gathas, the Yasna, the Yashts, and the Vendidad (Vīdēvdāt). The Gathas are the personal hymns and meditations of Zarathustra, which are believed to have been composed by the Iranian prophet himself. The Gathas were "piously preserved by being made part of the liturgy of the Yasna, the 'Act of Worship,' which was solemnized daily" (Boyce: *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* 2). This, also "in Gathic Avestan, appears to be made up of what are in essence even more ancient texts, composed to accompany the traditional offerings to fire and water, and revised in the light of Zarathustra's teachings" (Boyce: *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* 2). Next are the Yashts, the 21 hymns dedicated to the veneration of a group of *yazatas* (holy beings) and lesser gods. For example, Mihr Yasht is dedicated to Mithra, the protector of oaths, contracts, and covenants as well as the sun god, while Aban Yasht is dedicated to the veneration of the goddess of waters, Anahita. The section of the *Avesta* known as the Vendidad contains Zoroastrian laws, rituals, and religious practices and includes an important narrative on creation. Described by Zoroastrians as their book of laws, the Vendidad focuses primarily on the issue of pollution and provides a set of rules regarding purification. The Visperad constitutes a long liturgy divided into 24 chapters and contains homages to a group of Zoroastrian spiritual and

religious leaders. Finally, the *Khordeh Avesta* [Little Avesta], a book of common prayer, comprises a collection of short prayers and hymns that are used during special ceremonies, feasts, and celebrations.

The *Avesta* was composed in an eastern Iranian language called the Avestan in two separate linguistic stages, which are referred to as Old Avestan and Younger Avestan. The Old Avestan texts, such as the Gathas, are probably several centuries older than the Young Avestan texts. The language of the Gathas, called by some "Gathic Avestan," is closely related in form to the language of the Indian *Rig Veda* and thus is generally assigned to the second millennium BCE (Boyce: *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* 1). Since the Avestan belongs to the family of eastern Iranian languages, most scholars of ancient Iran have concluded that the prophet Zarathustra hailed from the Iranian-populated regions of Central Asia.

DOGS IN *AVESTA*

As reflected in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, dogs occupied a prominent role in the daily life of ancient Iranians. Dogs were highly prized, valued, and appreciated for guarding homes, protecting sheep and cattle, and watching for thieves, wolves, and other predatory animals. According to the teachings of the *Avesta,* harming or killing dogs was considered among the gravest of all sins. In the Pahlavi literature, we read that dogs were enemies of wolves and had been created to protect domesticated animals against attacks by wild beasts. No house could function and survive without a shepherd dog and a house dog. Dogs and roosters were close companions, and together they assisted Sraosha (Sorush), the deity of obedience and observance, in his struggle against the lie. Without the dog and the rooster, no house could be properly organized and protected. By its barking, a dog warned the members of the household against any predator approaching the house, just as a rooster sounded a distinctive alarm call when danger approached him and his family.

The *Avesta* distinguishes between a shepherd's dog, a house dog, a trained or hunting dog, and a vagrant dog. Regardless of the category they belonged to, however, dogs were viewed as friends of man and necessary to human life and security. They could not therefore be harmed, injured, or killed. The *Avesta* warned that the souls of those who either injured or killed a shepherd's dog, a house dog, a trained dog, or even a stray dog were condemned to excruciating pain and suffering as they passed to the other world. Dogs were believed to have highly complex personalities. They had the characteristics of eight categories of people, namely a priest, a warrior, a husbandman, a strolling singer, a thief, a *disu* (wild beast), a courtesan, and a child:

> He eats broken food, like a priest; he is grateful, like a priest; he is easily satisfied, like a priest; he wants only a small piece of bread, like a priest. …
>
> He marches in front, like a warrior; he fights for the beneficent cow, like a warrior; he goes first out of the house, like a warrior. …
>
> He is watchful and sleeps lightly, like a husbandman; he goes first out of the house, like a husbandman; he returns last into the house, like a husbandman. …

He sings like a strolling singer; he is intrusive, like a strolling singer; he is meagre, like a strolling singer; he is poor, like a strolling singer. …

He likes darkness, like a thief; he prowls about in darkness, like a thief; he is a shameless eater, like a thief; he is an unfaithful keeper, like a thief. …

He likes darkness, like a wild beast; he prowls about in darkness, like a wild beast; he is shameless eater, like a wild beast; he is an unfaithful keeper, like a wild beast. …

He sings, like a courtezan; he is intrusive, like a courtezan; he walks about the roads, like a courtezan; he is meagre, like a courtezan; he is poor, like a courtezan. …

He likes sleeping, like a child; he is apt to run away, like a child; he is full of tongue, like a child; he goes on all fours, like a child. …

Source: *The Zend-Avesta, Part I: The Vendidad, Fargard XIII,* translated by James Darmesteter (Delhi: Molital Banarsidass, 1965), 45–49.

See also: *Prophets:* Zarathustra (Zoroaster); *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; Primary Documents: Document 1; Document 2

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Bahram

An ancient Iranian warrior god and the god of victory who fights and defeats his opponents, including the evil spirit and its allies. His name appears as Verethragna (Victory) in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy scripture, and Wahram, Wahran, or Warahran in Middle Persian. In the *Avesta,* the Bahram Yasht is dedicated to the veneration of Verethragna. The warrior god is portrayed as the best armed of the heavenly deities created by the great god Ahura Mazda. Here, Verethragna assumes 10 different and distinct forms, in this order: (1) the shape of "a strong, beautiful wind" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 2); (2) the shape of "a beautiful bull, with yellow ears and golden horns" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 7); (3) the shape of "a white beautiful horse, with yellow ears and a golden caparison" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 9); (4) the shape of "a burden-bearing camel, sharp-toothed, swift, stamping forward, long-haired, and living in the abodes of men" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 11); (5) the shape of "a boar, opposing the foes, a sharp-toothed he-boar, a sharp-jawed boar, that kills at one stroke, pursuing, wrathful, with a dripping face, strong, and swift to run, and rushing all around" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 15); (6) the shape of "a beautiful youth of fifteen, shining, clear-eyed, thin-heeled" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 17); (7) the shape of "a raven[,] … the swiftest of all birds, the lightest of the flying creatures" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 19); (8) the shape of "a wild, beautiful ram, with horns bent around" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 23); (9) the shape of "a beautiful, fighting buck, with sharp horns" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 25); and (10) the shape of "a man, bright and beautiful, made by Mazda," holding "a sword with a golden blade, inlaid with all sorts of ornaments" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 27). As a strong and victorious warrior god, Verethragna smashes all obstacles and triumphs over armies, displaying his overwhelming strength in defeating and destroying the resistance of men, the Daevas (demons), the Yatus (wizards), the Pairikas (witches), and the oppressors (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 62). The prophet Zarathustra sacrifices to Verethragna, asking him "for victorious thinking, victorious speaking, victorious doing, victorious addressing, and victorious answering" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 32). The victorious deity is also credited as the powerful force who carries "the chariot of Kavi Usa [the Kayanian monarch Kay Kavus] upon his wings" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 39) and allows the "gallant Thraetaona [Fereydun]" to ride him in his battle against "Azhi Dahaka [Zahhak], the three-mouthed, the three-headed, the six-eyed" monster and "the strongest Druj [the lie]" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 40). But Verethragna does not only defeat armies

and break their columns asunder. The great warrior god also bestows sexual potency, "fountains of virility," as well as "the strength of arms, the health of the whole body," and "the eye-sight of the vulture with a golden collar" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Bahram Yasht, 33).

Classical sources, including Herodotus, wrote of the popularity of Ares, the god of war and the spirit of battle, among the Scythians of Central Asia. In his *Histories,* Herodotus stated that "the only gods the Scythians" worshipped were "Hestia (their chief deity), Zeus, and Earth (whom they believe to be the wife of Zeus), and, as deities of secondary importance, Apollo, Celestial Aphrodite, Heracles, and Ares" (Herodotus: 4.59). Herodotus also wrote that the Scythian god Ares, to whom the Scythians sacrificed prisoners of war, had his own temple (Herodotus: 4.62). The association of Verethragna with Ares continued during the Seleucid period. In an inscription in the sanctuary of Nimrud Dagh (present-day eastern Turkey) dating back to the first century BCE, King Antiochus I of Commagene lists the three divinities, namely Artagnes (Verethragna), Herakles, and Ares together. The veneration of Verethragna was also popular in the eastern regions of Greater Iran. The Kushans, who established a vast and powerful empire in the second half of the second century BCE in Central Asia and the territory of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern India, venerated the war god, who appeared on their coins "with a winged headdress, a characteristic motif in Iranian symbolism," which likens him to *khvarnah,* "i.e., to the Farro of the Kushans" (Gnoli: Bahram).

The significance of Wahram/Bahram and his popularity during the reign of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE) was such that six Persian kings were named Bahram/Wahram. Wahram was also used as an adjective for the sacred fires of the Sasanian era. In his inscription at the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster), the Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, who rose to power and prominence during the reigns of Shapur I, Hormozd I, Bahram I, and Bahram II, used "Wahram" as an adjective for the sacred fires he had established. Kartir stated that at the command of the Sasanian king of kings Shapur I, religious services had been multiplied in every province of the Persian Empire, and many Wahram (Bahram) Fires had been founded. He also boasted that during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Bahram II, with support from the Persian king of kings, he had founded many Wahram Fires in the land of Iran and at his own cost "in different places" (Boyce: *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* 112–113). In the Zoroastrian religious texts, the planet Mars was called "Vahram" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 5.1).

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Birds. *See* Sacred Birds

Bushyasta

A demon who is depicted in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, as the demonic force that brings lethargy, laziness, and untimely sleep. He is an intelligent, wise, and devious yellow demon who is sent by the evil spirit Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) to lure humans to oversleep, neglect their religious duties, and prevent them from working. He is a member of the large army of demons organized by Ahriman against the wise lord and the god of good, Ahura Mazda. His principal opponent in the *Avesta* is Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, the guarantor of covenants and alliances, and the god of light (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Mihr Yasht, 133–134).

See also: *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Mithra

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Fravashis and Fravardigan

In Zoroastrianism, *fravashi* referred to a soul of a dead person. *Fravashi* was also the inner "power in every being that maintains it and makes it grow and subsist" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 179). Originally, the *fravashis* were "the everlasting and deified souls of the dead, but in course of time they gained a wider domain, and not only men, but gods and even physical objects, like the sky and the earth, had each a *fravashi*" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 179). In the *Avesta,* the great god Ahura Mazda speaks to the prophet Zarathustra about the "vigor and strength, the glory, the help and the joy that are in the *fravashis* of the faithful" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 1). The *fravashis* were perceived as an enormous army of hundreds, thousands, and even tens of thousands of supernatural beings who assisted the architect of the universe, the great god Ahura Mazda, with the creation and maintenance of the world (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Farvardin Yasht, 65). It was through the brightness and glory of the *fravashis* that Ahura Mazda could maintain the sky, Earth, the stars, etc. In the *Avesta,* Yasht 13, or Farvardin Yasht, is dedicated to the *fravashis,* who are also associated with the cult of the dead. Ancient Iranians celebrated an All-Souls festival at the end of the year prior to the celebration of Nowruz (New Year). This festival was called Fravardigan. Fravardigan was a 10-day festival during which the people honored the spirits of the dead (Malandra: Frawardigan). The popular belief was that during these 10 days the souls (*fravashis*) of all the dead returned to Earth and visited their former homes. The souls of the righteous celebrated their return, while the souls of the evildoers trembled in fear. It was therefore necessary for everyone

during these particular days to "put fragrant perfumes on fire and … praise the souls, … and recite the Avesta so that those souls may be in comfort, joy and delight. And … during those … days they should not engage themselves in any other thing except in doing duties and good works, so that the souls may go back to their places with delight and pronounce benediction" (Boyce: Iranian Festivals).

The worship of the souls of ancestors continued after the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the introduction of Islam. The Iranian scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni described the annual veneration of the *fravashis:*

> The last five days of this month, the first of which is Ashtad, are Farvardagan. During this time people put food in the halls of the dead and drink on the roofs of the houses, believing that the spirits of their dead during these days come out from the places of their reward or their punishment that they go to the dishes laid out for them, imbibe their strength and suck their taste. They fumigate their houses with juniper, that the dead may enjoy its smell. The spirits of the pious men dwell among their families, children and relations, and occupy themselves with their affairs, although invisible to them. (Biruni: 210, 36)

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; *Avesta*

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Gathas

The Gathas are the personal and spiritual hymns and poems of the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra (Zoroaster). The word *gatha* has been translated as "poem," "hymn," and even "psalm" (Boyce: 1). Zarathustra's Gathas "are short verse texts, cast largely in the form of utterances addressed by him to Ahura Mazda; and they convey, through inspired poetry, visions of God and his purposes, and prophecies of things to come, here and hereafter" (Boyce: 1). The Gathas "are full of passionate feeling and conviction, with meaning densely packed into subtle and allusive words; and in form they belong, it seems, to an ancient and learned tradition of religious poetry composed by priestly seers, who sought through study and meditation to reach direct communion with the divine" (Boyce: 1). The Gathas constitute the oldest section of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, to have been preserved. The importance of the Gathas lies in the fact that they are believed to be the only surviving section of the Zoroastrian holy scripture to have been composed by the Iranian prophet himself. The tone and content of the Gathas is strictly monotheistic. There is only one god, a supreme deity, called Ahura Mazda, who has created the universe, Earth, and everything that is beautiful. The only hint of another powerful force is a reference to the evil spirit or the evil principle whose sole objective is to corrupt and destroy the creations of Ahura Mazda and introduce decay, death, and destruction to the world. While Ahura Mazda represents the truth, the evil spirit perpetuates the lie. In the Gathas, there is no reference to any other Indo-Iranian deity (*yazata*), such as Anahita, the goddess of waters and fertility, or Mithra, the guarantor of covenants and the sun god. These deities do appear, however, in other sections of the *Avesta,* which was most probably composed centuries after Zarathustra during the Arsacid and Sasanian periods. The Gathas begin with Zarathustra voicing the plea of the cow to the great god Ahura Mazda. The cow represents the pastoral nature of the Iranian society in great antiquity. Cattle herders were frequently attacked, raided, and plundered by

roaming and violent nomads who showed no mercy or compassion toward these peaceful and vulnerable communities. Beyond the social aspect of the Gathas, the deeply personal and mystical tone of the short verses reflect Zarathustra's relentless and determined journey in search of the truth and the mystery of divine majesty.

See also: *Prophets:* Zarathustra (Zoroaster); *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; *Avesta;* Primary Documents: Document 1

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Haoma

A holy plant as well as a divinity in Zoroastrianism. Haoma (Soma) was believed to provide health and strength. As a deity, Haoma belongs to the great antiquity when the ancient Aryans roamed the vast steppe of Inner Asia long before they departed their common ancestral land and branched off, settling in their newly adopted homes, present-day India and Iran. Haoma appears as Soma in ancient India's Vedic literature. In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, the prophet Zarathustra praises Haoma as "good, well-endowed, exact and righteous in its nature, and good inherently, and healing, beautiful of form, and good in deed, and most successful in its working, golden-hued, with bending sprouts," and "the best for drinking, so (through its sacred stimulus) it is the most nutritious for the soul" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 9.16). As a holy plant, Haoma provided extracts that were used in Zoroastrian rituals. These rituals centered on consumption of Haoma were long and complicated. The offering of Haoma mixed with milk is mentioned in the *Avesta.* Haoma was prepared by seven priests and consumed during the religious ceremonies. According to the *Avesta,* Haoma was the son of the great god Ahura Mazda. When Ahura Mazda presses the Haoma plant, the God of Haoma comes near him. The ingredients of the sacred Haoma juice were most probably ephedra mixed with poppy and cannabis. Haoma was based on a genus of ephedra, which was believed to possess exceptional healing power. Ephedra, a cone-bearing shrub that is native to China, Iran, and Central and South Asia, is a perennial evergreen that stands on average 1 to 1.5 feet (30 to 50 centimeters)

high but may grow even higher. Nearly leafless, the plant has slender, cylindrical, yellow-green branches. In China, Central Asia, India, and Iran, physicians prescribed the juice derived from ephedra for the common cold, coughs, asthma, headaches, and hay fever. Aside from its healing properties, Haoma provided its user with physical strength, expanded intellectual alertness, sexual appetite, and intoxication. The intoxicating Haoma was believed to offer supernatural powers, particularly in wars against formidable foes. When the legendary Kayanian monarch Kay Khosrow marches against his maternal grandfather Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, to avenge the death of his father, Siyavash, he receives support and assistance from Haoma.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Kay Khosrow; *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; *Avesta;* Magi

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Haurvatat

One of the holy immortals, or Amesha Spentas, brought into existence by the wise lord Ahura Mazda to assist him with the creation of the world. According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy and bountiful immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Middle Persian: Ameshaspands). The Amesha Spentas represented the six attributes of the great god in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy entities into existence to assist him with the creation and protection of six holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, waters, plants, animals, and fire from destruction by the evil spirit and his demonic allies. Ahura Mazda and his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the Amesha Spentas constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or the Heptad. Each holy immortal represents an attribute of its creator, Ahura Mazda. As beneficent beings who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for

protecting an element of the world order. Each of the holy immortals is "a *yazata,* that is, a being to be worshiped in his own right, with prayers, sacrifices, and hymns of praise; and they should be duly invoked, each by his own name, for the special help which they have been created to give, as Zoroaster himself invokes them in the Gāthās" (Boyce: Ameša Spenta). Haurvatat (meaning "wholeness, health, protection"), which appears as Hordad in Middle Persian and Khordad in new Persian, is one of the holy and beneficent immortals, created by Ahura Mazda to protect water. In Zoroastrian as well as the present-day solar calendar of Iran, Khordad is the name of the third month of the year. In the Zoroastrian calendar, Khordad is also the name of the sixth day of each month. In the Pahlavi text *Mah-e Farvardin Ruz-e Khordad* [The Month of Farvardin the Day of Khordad], the Iranian prophet Zarathustra asks the great god Ahura Mazda why people hold the sixth day (the day of Khordad) in the month of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian calendar) as the most auspicious of all days in the calendar (Kia: 7). In response, Ahura Mazda lists the great events that took place or will take place on this day, beginning with the act of creation and the birth of the first man, Gayomard. Included in this long list are three deeds accomplished by the legendary king of the Pishdadian dynasty, Jamshid. The third of these is the building of ossuaries (*astodanha*) and commanding people to make them: "And when they [people] saw what Jam [Jamshid] had commanded them, they made the day 'New Day' and called it Nowruz" (Kia: 7–8). Thus, according to this particular text, the Persian New Year, or Nowruz, began not on the first day of the month of Farvardin as it is celebrated today but on its sixth day. In his book *Athar ul-Baqiyeh* [Vestiges of the Past], the Iranian scholar Biruni wrote that on the sixth of Farvardin, the day of Khordad, the Persians celebrate "the Great Nowruz," for they believe that on this day God finished the creation, and on this day also "God created Saturn" and the prophet Zoroaster "came to hold communion with God" (Biruni: 201, 36).

See also: *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Religion:* Adur; Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Khshathra Vairya

According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Middle Persian: Ameshaspands). The Amesha Spentas represented the six attributes of the great god in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy entities into existence to assist him with the creation and protection of six holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, waters, plants, animals, and fire from destruction by the evil spirit and its demonic allies. Ahura Mazda and his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the Amesha Spentas constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or the Heptad. Each holy immortal represents an attribute of its creator, Ahura Mazda. As beneficent beings who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for protecting an element of the world order. Each of the holy immortals is "a *yazata,* that is, a being to be worshiped in his own right, with prayers, sacrifices, and hymns of praise; and they should be duly invoked, each by his own name, for the special help which they have been created to give, as Zoroaster himself invokes them in the Gāthās" (Boyce: Ameša Spenta). Khshathra Vairya (meaning "desirable kingdom" or "desirable dominion or power"), which appears as Shahrevar in Middle Persian and Shahrivar in New Persian, is one of the six holy and beneficent immortals created by the great god Ahura Mazda to watch over the metals and the sky, which was believed to have been made of solid stone.

See also: *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Religion:* Adur; Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Khvarnah

Khvarnah, which appears in Old Persian as *farnah,* in Middle Persian as *khvarrah,* and in New Persian as *farr,* is the divine glory. *Khvarnah,* "which appears in the shape of the Veregna or Varaghna bird is bestowed upon the righteous rulers of Iran" (Errington and Curtis: 115). *Khvarnah* is the "glory or divine grace which accompanies kings and great men who are just" (Boyce: 29). In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, *khvarnah* is mentioned in the context of the reign of Yima (Jamshid). Yima, the son of Vivanghvant, is described as "the good shepherd"; the ruler of the seven climes of Earth, who took from the demons (*daevas*) "both riches and welfare"; and the king in whose reign "there was neither cold wind nor hot wind, neither old age nor death" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 31–33). But when Yima begins "to find delight in words of falsehood and untruth," the glory (i.e., *khvarnah*) is "seen to flee away from him in the shape of a bird" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 34). When his glory departs Yima "in the shape of the Veregna bird" (probably a raven), then Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, seizes that glory (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 35). The glory is eventually seized by another hero of legendary Iran, Thraetaona (Fereydun), "the heir of the valiant Āthwya clan" who is "the most victorious of all victorious men next to Zarathustra" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Zamyad Yasht, 36). It becomes clear from the story of Yima that when *khvarnah* departs a ruler, he is unable to continue his rule. Thus, when Yima claims divinity, *khvarnah* leaves him, and Yima is forced to abandon his throne, falling victim eventually to Azhi Dahaka (Dahak, Zahhak). Among the Zoroastrian deities, the warrior god and the god of victory Verethragna (Bahram), who fights and defeats his opponents, including the evil spirit and its allies, is often associated with *khvarnah.* But *khvarnah* also receives protection and support from other deities, including Anahita (Anahid), the goddess of waters; Mithra, the god of oaths and covenants.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Fereydun; Jamshid; Zahhak; *Religion:* Mithra

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Magi

Priestly caste of ancient Iran, particularly in the western regions of the Iranian-speaking world during the reigns of the Median and Achaemenid dynasties. In his inscription at Bisotun near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran, the Achaemenid king Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) described his seizure of power after the death of Cambyses II, the first son and successor of Cyrus II the Great. Darius stated that while Cambyses II was completing his conquest of Egypt, a revolt erupted against him in Persia. Cambyses returned home to quell the rebellion, but he died before reaching his destination. The man who had revolted against Cambyses claimed that he was Bardiya, the deceased king's younger brother. In his inscription, however, Darius dismissed this claim and asserted that the rebel leader was not Bardiya, since Cambyses had killed his brother before embarking on his Egyptian campaign. Darius identified the rebel leader as a priest, or a magian (*magush*), by the name of Gaumata. According to Darius, Gaumata impersonated Bardiya, the second son of Cyrus the Great and the younger brother of Cambyses II, and seized the Persian throne. This narrative was used as a justification for Darius and six fellow officers to stage a coup d'état and overthrow Bardiya/Gaumata.

The Greek historian Herodotus, who referred to Gaumata as Smerdis, also called him a *magos* whom Cambyses had appointed as the "steward of his household" (Herodotus: 3.63). Herodotus stated that the magi were one of the six tribes in Media and constituted a hereditary priestly caste. They had to be present when sacrifices were made to gods, and they uttered incantations over the sacrificed animal in words, which recounted "the Birth of Gods" (Herodotus: 1.132). In the documents unearthed in the Achaemenid palace complex of Persepolis in southern Iran, the magi are mentioned as recipients of wine and barley. These documents written in Elamite refer to the magi as *makush.* The magi played an important role in the daily life of the Achaemenid kings. The Achaemenid monarchs sought their opinion on a variety of issues and important decisions. When the king had a dream, the magi were consulted regarding its meaning and

significance. They also accompanied the monarch and his armies on military campaigns, praying for the victory of the troops, singing hymns, and making libations to the sea and offering sacrifices of white horses to propitiate rivers (Herodotus: 7.113).

As the cultural elite of their time, the magi served as educators and teachers of the royal family. Even after the passing of a king, they continued to safeguard his tomb. When Alexander the Macedon arrived at the tomb of Cyrus the Great, he found a group of magi guarding it, "a duty which had been handed down from father to son ever since the time of Cyrus's son, Cambyses" (Arrian: 6.29.4–11). They had "a grant from the King of a sheep a day, with an allowance of meal and wine, and one horse a month to sacrifice to Cyrus" (Arrian: 6.29.4–11). But the activities of the magi were not confined to religious and spiritual functions. They also acted as administrators. Their presence was indispensable in legal and economic transactions.

During the reign of the Arsacid dynasty, the magi continued to play important religious as well as political roles. The Greek author Strabo wrote that in Cappadocia, in present-day central Turkey, a large sect of magi kept many temples to the Persian gods. Each temple featured an enclosure, and within these were altars on which lay a large quantity of ashes. Upon these altars, the magi kept fires continuously burning. Around these on a daily basis, the magi chanted incantations for about an hour, "holding before the fire their bundle of rods and wearing round their heads high turbans of felt," which reached down "over their cheeks far enough to cover their lips" (Strabo: 15.3.15). The role of the magi, however, was not confined to the domain of religious activities. They also figured prominently in the political life of the empire. Strabo wrote that in selecting their kings, the Parthians (Arsacids) consisted of "two groups, one that of kinsmen, and the other that of wise men and Magi, from both of which groups the kings were appointed" (Strabo: 2.9.3–10).

In 224 CE Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr and a former vassal of the Arsacid dynasty, defeated and killed the Arsacid king Artabanus IV on the battlefield. The death of Artabanus IV signaled the end of Arsacid rule. Ardashir founded the Sasanian dynasty, which ruled from 224 to 651 CE. The ancestor of Ardashir I, Sasan, had served as the custodian of the temple of Anahid, the Iranian goddess of waters, in the district of Istakhr in the province of Fars. According to the Byzantine historian Agathias, Ardashir "was a devotee of the magian religion and an official celebrant of its mysteries. Consequently the priestly caste of the magi rose to inordinate power and arrogance. This body had indeed made its influence felt on previous occasions in the course of its long history, though it had never before been elevated to such a position of privilege and immunity, but had hitherto been

officially accorded what in certain respects amounted to an inferior status" (Agathias: 2.26.2).

In the Christian tradition, the magi appear as three wise men, members of the learned class of astronomers and astrologers in ancient Persia who arrive in Bethlehem shortly after the birth of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew refers to them by the Greek term *magoi,* which denotes wise men in general, and had them declare that they had seen the star at its rising (Matthew 2:1–2:12).

See also: *Ancient Cities:* Bisotun Inscription; *K&Q, Achaemenid:* Darius I

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Mithra

Mithra was a deity worshipped in ancient India and Iran. He is mentioned over 200 times in the Hindu scriptures *Rig Veda.* It is not clear when Mithra joined the pantheon of ancient Iranian gods. In the

oldest remaining segment of the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Gathas, the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) does not mention Mithra. This omission has led some scholars to conclude that Zarathustra, who had called on his people to worship the one god, Ahura Mazda, had discarded Mithra and other pagan gods as deities worthy of veneration. Among the 21 Yashts, or collection of Avestan hymns, each paying homage to a particular Zoroastrian deity, however, one Yasht is dedicated to Mithra, the protector of oaths, contracts, and covenants who was created by the supreme god, Ahura Mazda, to protect wide cattle pastures and waters. In Mihr Yasht, Mithra appears as "the lord of wide pastures, who has a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes, a yazata [a god or angelic deity worthy of veneration] invoked by his own name" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Mihr Yasht, 1). Ahura Mazda informs the prophet Zarathustra that he had created "Mithra, the lord of wide pastures as worthy of sacrifice, as worthy of prayer as myself, Ahura Mazda" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Mihr Yasht, 1). Originally "Mithra was the god of heavenly light and in that character" he knew the truth as he saw everything; he was "therefore taken as a witness of truth" and was "the preserver of oaths and good faith," and he chastised those who broke "their promises" and lied to Mithra, destroying their houses and killing them in battle (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* 119). It is not clear how and when Mithra emerged as the deity representing the sun. The Persian Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II mentioned Mithra in his inscription but did not identify the deity with the sun (Kent: 154–155). According to Athenaeus, the Persian Achaemenid kings could only get drunk in public on the day they sacrificed to the god Mithra. During this great festival, dedicated to the worship of Mithra, the king drank and danced to his heart's content (Athenaeus: X.434e). The Greek geographer Strabo, who lived in the first century BCE and was a contemporary of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty, wrote that the Persians called the sun Mithra. Strabo also wrote that the satrap (governor) of Armenia "used to send to the Persian king twenty thousand foals every year at the time of Mithracina," the annual festival in honor of the Persian sun god Mithras (Strabo: 11.14.9–10). Sometime during the Seleucid period, Mithra became associated and at times equated with the Greek god of light and the sun, Apollo. Mithra was so widely and popularly venerated that the names of several Iranian, Armenian, and Anatolian dynasts contained Mithra. Four kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty as well as several rulers of Armenia and Pontus on the southern coast of the Black Sea in present-day northeastern Turkey were named Mithridates (Gift of Mithra). Mithra was also depicted on Parthian and Kushan coins. The Persian Sasanians, who overthrew the Arsacid dynasty in 224 CE, continued to venerate Mithra. The image

of Mithra appears on the relief of Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE) at Taq-e Bostan near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. Here, Mithra stands behind the Sasanian monarch as he celebrates his victory over the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate in 363 CE. In the Zoroastrian calendar, the 16th day of each month and the seventh month of the year were both named after Mithra. In 1925 when the Zoroastrian names of the months in the Iranian calendar were restored, the seventh month was named Mehr, the name for Mithra in New Persian.

After the fall of the Sasanian dynasty in 651 and the introduction of Islam by Arab Muslims, Iranians continued to celebrate many of their ancient festivals, including Jashn-e Mehrgan, or Mehregan. Rich and poor, men and women, boys and girls participated in joyous celebrations. Dressed in new clothes, families prepared sumptuous meals and celebrated Mehregan by playing songs and dancing to joyous music. The authors of the Islamic era, including the scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni and the historian Gardizi, linked the celebration of the ancient Iranian feast of Mehregan to the story of the legendary blacksmith Kaveh and his revolt against the tyrannical king Zahhak (Biruni: 207–208; Gardizi: 520–521). Gardizi wrote that Mehregan was celebrated because on this day, Fereydun (Afaridun) triumphed over Zahhak, captured the tyrant, and dragged him in chains to a cave at the summit of Mount Damavand (Gardizi: 520). According to Biruni, the Sasanian kings of ancient Iran celebrated Mehregan on the 16th day of the Iranian month of Mehr by wearing a special crown upon which was engraved an image of the sun and of the wheel upon which it turned (Biruni: 207, 40). Biruni goes on to explain that the Persians believed that the day of Mehregan was especially important because it celebrated the joy of the people when they heard the legendary hero Fereydun coming forth to rule after Kaveh had revolted against the evil king Zahhak, calling on the people to rally around Fereydun as their legitimate king (Biruni: 207, 40–208, 1). Biruni also reminded his readers that the Persian kings had adopted as their own standard the gold- and jewel-encrusted leather apron of the blacksmith Kaveh, the Derafsh-e Kavyan, and considered it a good omen (Biruni: 208, 1). After the fall of the Sasanian dynasty in 651 CE and the conversion of the majority of the population to Islam, Iranians continued to celebrate Mehregan. Today, Zoroastrians continue to celebrate Mehregan by wearing new clothes, setting up a colorful table, and preparing sumptuous meals.

The ancient Indo-Iranian god Mithra (Mitra) depicted on a rock relief at Taq-e Bostan, near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. Originally designated as the god of contracts, covenants, agreements, and treaties, Mithra was identified also as the sun deity. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; Anahita; *Avesta;* Primary Documents: Document 40

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Sacred Birds

Ancient Iranians believed that the great god Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) had created every creature for a reason and a purpose (*Bundahishn:* 9.157). Among Zoroastrians, many birds were held in great deference and esteem. They were generally believed to be wise, intelligent, crafty, and cunning creatures (*Bundahishn:* 9.155). No bird was as wily and conniving as the crow. There were several birds that were viewed as sacred creatures in the *Avesta* and the Pahlavi texts. One such bird was the owl. In *Bundahishn* we are told that the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, was composed in the hooting of the owl. When the owl hooted, the demons fled. Owls lived on the plains and deserts and preferred to reside in ruins, forcing demons out of such sites (*Bundahishn:* 9.154–155). Another was the white eagle who killed the snakes. Vultures and crows were also praised and revered as old and wise creatures that were created to kill and eat reptiles as well as the corpses and the carcasses of animals, including deer, elk, and zebras (*Bundahishn:* 9.155). Another holy bird was the rooster, which was viewed as an enemy of demons and evil spirits. The rooster was a companion of the dog, and together they assisted Sraosha (Sorush), the deity of obedience and observance, in his struggle against the lie. Without the dog and the rooster, no house could be properly organized and protected. The crowing of the rooster at the break of dawn welcomed the rising of the sun and the arrival of a new day. He also sat on a high perch to look out for his family, sounding a distinctive alarm call when predators approached him and his family.

Sculpture of a bird identified by some as the sacred bird Homa, at Persepolis in Fars province in southern Iran. (Jasmina/Dreamstime.com)

See also: *Religion: Avesta*

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Saoshyant

An Avestan term that originally referred to a savior; to an individual of exulted status; a helper or a benefactor, such as a learned,

intelligent, and wise prophet; or a spiritual leader, such as Zarathustra (Zoroaster) himself, who should be emulated. In late Zoroastrian eschatology the term referred to the last of the three saviors of the world. According to Pahlavi texts, three sons will be born from Zarathustra's seed at 1,000-year intervals. These three sons are Hushedar, Hushedarmah, and the Soshyans (Saoshyant) (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.8). In *Bundahishn,* we read that Zarathustra copulated with Hvovi/Hvov three times, "and each time the seed went to the ground; the angel Neryosang [the Nairyosangha of the *Avesta,* the angel who is believed to be Ahura Mazda's messenger to mankind] received the brilliance and strength of that seed, delivered it with care to the angel Anahid [the goddess of waters], and in time will blend it with a mother" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.9). Each son and savior will be born after a young maiden bathes herself in the waters of the sea of Kasaoya and is impregnated by the seed of Zarathustra, which has been preserved and protected in those waters by the goddess Anahid along with 9,999 "guardian spirits" so "that the demons may not injure it" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 32.9). The arrival of each son and savior will usher in a new era of progress among humanity. For example, in the "millennium of Hushedarmah, the strength of appetite (*āz*) will … diminish, … and men will remain three days and nights in superabundance … through one taste of consecrated food. Then they will desist from meat food, and eat vegetables and milk; afterwards, they abstain from milk food and abstain from vegetable food, and are feeding on water; and for ten years before Soshyans comes they remain without food, and do not die" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 30.2–4). With the arrival of the Saoshyant, the dead are prepared for their resurrection (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 30.4). First the bones of the first man, Gayomard, "are roused up," then those of Mashi and Mashyani, and then the rest of mankind; "in the fifty-seven years of Soshyans they prepare all the dead, and all men stand up; whoever is righteous and whoever is wicked, every human creature, they rouse up from the spot where its life departs" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 30.7). After "all material living beings" have assumed their bodies and forms, then they will be assigned to "a single class" (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 30.7–8). This may imply that the appearance of Soshyans was expected to usher the abolition of all class and caste distinctions (*Pahlavi Texts, Part I:* Bundahishn, 123n2).

See also: *Prophets:* Zarathustra (Zoroaster); *Religion: Avesta*

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Spenta Armaiti

One of the holy immortals in Zoroastrianism who acts as the protector of Earth. According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda had created the world through his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, and with assistance from six holy immortals known as Amesha Spentas (Middle Persian: Ameshaspands). The Amesha Spentas represented the six attributes of the great god in the material world. Ahura Mazda brought these holy entities into existence to assist him with the creation and protection of six holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, waters, plants, animals, and fire, from destruction by the evil spirit and its demonic allies. Ahura Mazda and Spenta Mainyu, together with the Amesha Spentas, constitute Zoroastrianism's seven holy immortals, or the Heptad. Each holy immortal represents an attribute of its creator. As bounteous and beneficent beings who bestow good on Earth, each is responsible for protecting an element of the world order. Each of the Amesha Spentas is "a *yazata,* that is, a being to be worshiped in his own right, with prayers, sacrifices, and hymns of praise; and they should be duly invoked, each by his own name, for the special help which they have been created to give, as Zoroaster himself invokes them in the Gāthās" (Boyce: Ameša Spenta). One of the six holy and beneficent immortals created by the great god Ahura Mazda to assist him with the act of creation was Spenta Armaiti (holy devotion), who appears as Spendarmad in Middle Persian and Esfand in New Persian. Spenta Armaiti, the holy immortal who represents righteous obedience, was brought into existence to protect Earth and preserve its fertility. The fifth day of every month and the 12th month of the Iranian calendar, are named after this *yazata.* Each of the six holy immortals has its own opponent who has been brought into existence by the evil spirit. The greatest adversary and opponent of Spenta Armaiti is Nanghithya, a demon and member of the army led

by Angra Mainyu (Ahriman).

See also: *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; *Avesta*

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Tishtrya

The ancient Iranian deity of rains. As the divine being (*yazata*) who represents rains, Tishtrya fights Apaosha, the witch of drought, to liberate the waters of the world, which are held in an ocean called Vourukasha. The ultimate purpose of this fight is to release the waters contained in Vourukasha so that Earth and everything beautiful, which Ahura Mazda has created, can survive. When the two clash on the battlefield Tishtrya is defeated, but on the second confrontation the *yazata* triumphs over his challenger. The victory of Tishtrya allows the waters contained in Vourukasha to be liberated and divided among the countries of the world. Tishtrya also fights against the female demon Duzhyairya, the witch of bad harvest or bad year. In the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, the eighth Yasht (Hymn) devoted to a divine being is dedicated to Tishtrya. Tishtrya is depicted as a deity who rises from the source of all waters, the Sea of Vourukasha, who distributes Earth's waters among the countries. The deity of rains allows water to pour upon Earth and the fields. In the Iranian calendar the fourth of the month is Tir, named after the deity Tishtrya. Ancient Iranians celebrated this deity through a festival called Tiragan.

See also: *Legendary Kings:* Arash; Ahura Mazda; *Avesta*

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Vayu

The ancient Iranian deity of wind who is presented in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, as "the bright and glorious" deity who goes "through the two worlds, the one which the Good Spirit has made and the one which the Evil Spirit has made" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 42–43). Vayu resides in the realm that lies between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, between good and evil, the light and darkness. As Vayu, "the atmosphere, is the place in which the conflict of the two principles takes place, one part of him belongs to the Evil Spirit," while the other part chases the demons with its sharp spear and golden weapons to protect the good creations of Ahura Mazda (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Darmesteter, 250n5). The first part of Ram Yasht enumerates the heroes and villains who sacrificed to Vayu. These include the great god Ahura Mazda, Haoshyangha Paradhata (Hoshang the Pishdad), Takhma Urupa (Tahmasp), Yima (Jamshid), Azhi Dahaka (Zahhak), Thraetaona (Fereydun), Keresaspa (Garshasp), Aurvasara, Hutaosa (the wife of King Vishtaspa), and Iranian maids (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II:* Ram Yasht, 2, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27, 31, 35, 39).

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; *Avesta*

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Vendidad

The name Vendidad (Vīdēvdāt), which has been invariably translated as "the law against demons," "antidemonic law," "the law repudiating the demons," or "the law against the evil beings," is one of the major components of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. The name Vendidad is a corruption of "Vidaevadata" (Boyce: 2). Described by Zoroastrians as their book of laws, the Vendidad contains a body of rules, laws, and prescribed rituals. The Vendidad focuses primarily on the issue of pollution and provides a set of rules regarding

purification. The first section of the Vendidad focuses on the creations of the great god Ahura Mazda and how the evil spirit Angra Mainyu corrupted them by giving birth to an army of destructive forces. In this section Ahura Mazda enumerates the lands he had created, beginning with Airyanem Vaejah, "The Expanse of the Aryans/ Iranians" or the homeland of the Iranian people in great antiquity (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 1.1).

THE PERFECT LANDS

In the Vendidad, the great god Ahura Mazda enumerates the 16 perfect lands, which he had created. These regions are believed to be the regions where the first Iranians settled. Of these 16 regions, the first is Airyanem Vaejah (The Expanse of the Aryans/Iranians), which appears as Eranvej in Middle Persian and Iranvij in New Persian. Airyanem Vaejah may be viewed as the mythological homeland of the Iranian people, although some scholars have attempted to designate a geographical definition for the region, which had 10 winter months and 2 summer months. The other regions that can be identified with some certainty are Sughda (Old Persian: Suguda; New Persian: Soghd), centered in Samarqand in present-day Uzbekistan; Mouru (Old Persian: Margu; New Persian: Marv/Merv), in present-day southern Turkmenistan; Bakhdhi (Old Persian: Bakhtri; New Persian: Balkh), in present-day northern Afghanistan; Haroyu (Old Persian: Haraiva; New Persian: Hari or Harirud), in present-day northwestern Afghanistan; Vehrkana (Old Persian: Varkana; New Persian: Gorgan), in present-day northern Iran; Harahvaiti (Old Persian: Harauvati; New Persian: Arghandab), in present-day southern Afghanistan; Haetumant (New Persian: Helmand); Rhagae (Old Persian: Raga; New Persian: Ray), in present-day northern Iran south of modern-day Tehran; Hapta Hindu (Old Persian: Hindava; New Persian: Hind), the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan; Vaekereta (Middle Persian: Kapul; New Persian: Kabul), in present-day central Afghanistan; Urva (Middle Persian: Meshan; New Persian: Mesene), in present-day southern Iraq and Kuwait; Varena (Middle Persian: Patashkhvargar or Deylam; New Persian: Mazandaran and Gilan); Rangha (Middle Persian: Arvastani Rum; New Name: Eastern Mesopotamia); Nisaya, perhaps ancient Nisa in present-day southern Turkmenistan; and Kakhra (unknown).

Section 2 of the Vendidad is devoted to Yima, who appears as King Jamshid of the Pishdadian dynasty in the legendary history of Iran. This section is divided into two parts. In the first part, the great god Ahura Mazda invites Yima to receive the divine law and introduces it to humanity. When Yima turns down the request, the god demands that Yima protect his divine creations and ensure their prosperity. Yima acts accordingly and protects all god's creations from disease and death. As prosperity reigns, the population of Earth increases. In the second part, which has a striking resemblance to the biblical story of Noah and his ark, Yima is told by god to collect the best representatives of all animals and plants and provide them with

shelter so they would survive an approaching winter that will destroy every living creature. The third chapter of the Vendidad deals with what comforts and discomforts Earth. This section ends with a subsection forbidding the burial of the dead and an enumeration of the penalties for burying the corpse of a human or a dog in the earth (*The Zend-Avesta, Part I:* Vendidad, 3.4). Section 4 is devoted exclusively to civil and penal laws. Sections 5 to 13 of Vendidad focus primarily on the religious rituals, which have to be observed by the believer to deal with pollution, uncleanliness, and impurity arising from the dead. Sections 13 and 14 focus on dogs, their role and importance in a community's daily life, and the severe penalties for hurting, injuring, and killing them. As Zoroastrians believed that all their laws were conveyed as revelations from Ahura Mazda to the prophet Zarathustra, the entire text of the Vendidad is structured as a dialogue between the great god and his prophet (Malandra: Vendidad).

See also: *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Airyanem Vaejah; *Avesta*

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Vohu Manah

Vohu Manah, meaning "good mind/good thought/good purpose," is one of the holy and bounteous immortals (i.e., Amesha Spentas) who were brought into existence by the wise lord Ahura Mazda to assist him with creating the six holy elements, namely the sky, Earth, water, plants, cattle, and fire. Ahura Mazda himself is the creator and the protector of man. Ahura Mazda and his holy spirit, Spenta Mainyu, together with the six holy immortals constitute the Zoroastrian Heptad (Unit of Seven). Vohu Manah is the holy immortal responsible for

guarding the cattle. In the Gathas, the Iranian prophet Zarathustra states that the righteous path leading the faithful to the great god Ahura Mazda goes through Vohu Manah (*The Zend-Avesta, Part III:* Yasna, 28, 29, 30). Zoroastrians interpret this statement as meaning that exercising the right moral choice with the assistance of the good mind can bring one closer to Ahura Mazda. As with the other five holy immortals, Vohu Manah is also matched against an evil spirit who intends to attack and destroy divine creations. The evil spirit opposed to Vohu Manah is Akem-mano or Aka Manah (Bad Thought). Like the other five Amesha Spentas, Vohu Manah is also venerated separately; he has a month named for him and is celebrated with a festival of his own. Vohu Manah appears as Vahman in Middle Persian and Bahman in New Persian. In the Iranian calendar today, Bahman is the name of the 11th month of the year, which corresponds with January–February.

See also: *Cultures:* Ab, Aban, Aban Mah; *Religion:* Adur; Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; Amesha Spentas; Anahita; *Avesta;* Mithra

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Yazatas

Deities or lesser gods in Zoroastrianism, who have been created by the great god Ahura Mazda (the lord of wisdom) to assist him with the maintenance, preservation, and protection of the world order. In performing their responsibility as the supporters of Ahura Mazda, the *yazatas* act as an army of angelic forces who fight against the evil spirit Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) and his army of demons who have been created to corrupt and destroy the creations of Ahura Mazda. The assistance provided by the *yazatas* is essential in supporting man in his struggle against demonic forces as he attempts to protect his

body and soul from evil. The prophet Zarathustra venerated the *yazatas* and appealed to them to grant him strength, health, and vitality so he could achieve his mission as the messenger of the great god Ahura Mazda. Those who follow the teachings of Zarathustra mirror the example set by their great prophet and venerate the *yazatas* through prayers and sacramental offerings, in expectation of gaining health, happiness, and prosperity from a whole array of *yazatas.* There are numerous *yazatas* who are mentioned in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book. Some of the most important *yazatas* are Anahita, the goddess of waters; Mithra, the guarantor of oaths and alliances as well as the sun god of ancient Iran; Verethraghna (Wahran, Bahram), the warrior god of victory; Tishtrya (Tir), the deity of rains; Rashnu, the genius of truth; and Sraosha (Sorush), the angel of divine worship.

See also: *Religion:* Ahura Mazda; Anahita; *Avesta;* Bahram; Mithra; Tishtrya

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Zurvan

The god of infinite and boundless time in ancient Iran, Zurvan also appears as the father of Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd), the god of wisdom and the principle of goodness, and Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), the demonic force and the principle of evil. As the primordial god in Iranian religious thought, Zurvan may have been worshipped before the advent of Zoroastrianism.

Because he is androgynous, that is, genderless, Zurvan had to perform sacrifices for 1,000 years before being able to produce his children, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. With children representing the two opposites, Zurvan himself is regarded as a neutral god, one for whom there is no distinction between good and evil. A supreme and transcendent being, Zurvan is the highest god and the true lord of the universe. A heterodox religious movement called Zurvanism was dedicated to the worship of Zurvan. The adherents of Zurvanism

worshipped the god of infinite time as the supreme architect of the universe. As already noted, Zurvan was the father and creator of Ahura Mazda, the god of goodness and light, and Ahura Mazda's opponent, the demonic Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, the evil spirit.

In his teachings, the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) called upon his followers to worship Ahura Mazda as the wise lord and the supreme creator and architect of the universe. Zoroastrianism also taught that Ahura Mazda was in a state of constant and fierce struggle against Ahriman, the demonic force who had brought evil, darkness, and destruction to the world. This dualism presented a fundamental dilemma: if Ahura Mazda was the all-powerful architect of the universe, was he also the creator of Ahriman? If Ahura Mazda had created evil, then how could he be worshipped as the god of light who had only brought goodness to the world? And if he had not created evil, who was responsible for the existence of good and evil and setting them in a struggle to dominate the world?

The introduction of the new primal and eternal being called Zurvan Akarana (the infinite, unlimited, and boundless time) resolved this dilemma. Those who worshipped Zurvan believed that everything in the world emanated from the god of infinite time. As the god of eternity, he did not have a beginning or an end and could not be comprehended by human mind and intellect. He was the father and the mother of the two conflicting principles, or the two opposing twins Ahura Mazda (the good) and Ahriman (the evil). These two spirits were engaged in a long and fierce battle. The struggle between the two sons of Zurvan was to conclude with the victory of Ahura Mazda and the defeat and expulsion of Ahriman.

Although the Zoroastrian religious establishment viewed it as a heresy, Zurvanism was widely practiced in Greater Iran while at the same time leaving a profound impact on religions thought during the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian periods. The belief in Zurvan as the father and creator of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman was so widespread during the Sasanian era that Mehr Narseh, the powerful and influential chief minister (*wuzurg farmadār*) of the Sasanian monarchs Yazdegerd I (r. 399–421 CE), Bahram V (r. 421–439 CE), Yazdegerd II (r. 439–457 CE), and Peroz (r. 459–484 CE), held to Zurvanism as the fundamental tenet of his beliefs (Frye: 321). Zurvan was also part of the pantheon of gods worshipped in Sogdiana, the region lying between the Oxus River (Amu Darya) to the south and the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) to the north, with its central region located in the Zarafshan and Kashka Darya River Valleys. The Sogdian pantheon "is fascinating for the identification of local with foreign deities," writes historian and author Richard Nelson Frye; thus, Zurvan can be equated to Brahma, one of the major gods of Hinduism (Frye: 352).

Zurvanism also influenced the teachings of the Iranian prophet Mani (216–276 CE). The ideas of Mani were founded on Iranian dualism, which believed in the constant struggle between the good and the evil, or between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. According to Mani, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman were twin brothers who were created by the supreme god Zurvan. As the father of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, Zurvan stood above and beyond the two opposing and hostile sons.

See also: *Prophets:* Mani; *Religion:* Ahriman; Ahura Mazda; *Avesta*

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PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

1. THE GATHAS OF ZARATHUSTRA FROM THE ZOROASTRIAN *AVESTA*

The Gathas constitute the oldest section of the Avesta, *the Zoroastrian holy scripture. They are believed to have been composed by the ancient Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) as his personal hymns and meditations. The word* gatha *has been translated as "hymn," "poem," or even "psalm." Zarathustra's Gathas "are short verse texts, cast largely in the form of utterances addressed by him to Ahura Mazda; and they convey, through inspired poetry, visions of God and his purposes, and prophecies of things to come, here and hereafter" (Mary Boyce,* Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism *[Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990], 1). In the excerpt below, Zarathustra appears before the great god Ahura Mazda (wise lord, lord wisdom) with an appeal for divine guidance. The Iranian prophet speaks on behalf of those who raise cattle (kine). Zarathustra decries the violent attacks they are forced to endure and pleads for the intervention of the benevolent and wise lord on behalf of truth and righteousness.*

THE GĀTHAS.

YASNA XXIX

THE WAIL OF THE KINE. THE CALL OF ZARTHUSTRA. HIS PRAYER FOR AID.

1. Unto you (O Ahura and Asha!) the Soul of the Kine (our sacred herds and folk) cried aloud: For whom did ye create me, and by whom did ye fashion me? On me comes the assault of wrath, and of violent power, the blow of desolation, audacious insolence, and (thievish) might. None other pasture-giver have I than you, therefore do ye teach me good (tillage) for the fields (my only hope of welfare)!

Ahura Speaks.

2. Upon this the Creator of the Kine (the holy herds) asked of Righteousness: How (was) thy guardian for the Kine (appointed) by thee when, as having power (over all her fate), ye made her? (In what manner did ye secure) for her, together with pasture, a cattle-chief who was both skilled and like-wise energetic? Whom did you select as her (life's) master who might hurl back the fury of the wicked?

Ahura answers.

3. To Him the (Divine Righteousness) answered with his sanctity. (Great was our perplexity); a chieftain who was capable of smiting back (their fury), and who was himself without hate (was not to be obtained by us); among such things as these, those things are not to be known (by beings such as we) which are the influences which approach (and move) the lofty fires (revealing the favour and the will of God).

Of beings He is the mightiest to whom those who have performed their actions approach with invocations. (He has no need to ask!)

Zarathustra intervenes.

4. The Great Creator (is himself) most mindful of the uttered indications which have been fulfilled beforehand hitherto in the deeds of demon-gods and (good or evil) men, and of those which shall be fulfilled by them hereafter. He Ahura is the discerning arbiter; so shall it be to us as He shall will!

5. Therefore it is that we both, my soul and (the soul) of the mother Kine, (are) make our supplications for the two worlds to Ahura, and with hands stretched out in entreaty, when we pray to the Great Creator with questions in our doubt; (and He will answer).

Not for the righteous liver, not for the thrifty (tiller of the earth), shall there be destruction together with the wicked!

Ahura.

6. Upon this the Lord, the Great Creator, He who understands the mysterious grace by His insight, spoke thus: Not in this manner is a spiritual master found for us, nor a chieftain moved by Righteousness and appointed (in its spirit); therefore Thee have I named (as such a head) to the diligent tiller of the ground!

The Ameshôspends.

7. Mazda has created the inspired Word-of-reason which is a Mãthra of fatness (for the offering), the (Divine) Righteousness consenting

with Him in his deed. Food he has prepared for the Kine and for the eaters, He the one bountiful with his (saving) doctrine; but whom hast Thou, endowed with the Good Mind, who may give forth those (doctrines) by word of mouth to mortals?

Ahura.

8. This man is found for me here who alone has hearkened to our enunciations, Zarathustra Spitama! Our mighty and completed acts of grace he desires to enounce for us, for (Me), the Great Creator and for Righteousness; wherefore I will give him the good abode (and authoritative place) of such an one as speaks!

Source: *The Zend-Avesta, Part III: The Yasna, Visparad, Afringan, Gahs, and Miscellaneous Fragments,* translated by L. H. Mills (Delhi: Molital Banarsidass, 1965), Yasna XXIX, 6–11.

2. THE LANDS OF THE ANCIENT IRANIANS FROM THE *AVESTA*

In Vendidad, the section of the Avesta *(the Zoroastrian holy book) that focuses primarily on pollution, purification, and healing, the great god Ahura Mazda speaks to the prophet Zarathustra about the 16 lands and countries he had created. These lands, which presumably constitute the ancient homeland of the Iranian people, extend from Punjab in the east to Raghae (Ray) in the west and from Sogdiana in the north to the Helmand in the south. The first region or land mentioned in the list of 16 is Airyanem Vaejah (Eranvej), "the Expanse of the Aryans/Iranians," the legendary homeland of the Avestan people. On each occasion when Ahura Mazda creates a good country, the evil spirit (Angra Mainyu/Ahriman), who is nothing but death, countercreates, corrupting and defiling the creations of the good god through his demonic agents.*

Ahura Mazda spoke unto Spitama Zarathustra, saying:

I have made every land dear (to its people), even though it had no charms whatever in it; had I not made every land (dear to its people), even though it had no charms whatever in it, then the whole living world would have invaded the Airyana Vaeja [Airyanam Vaejah or Eranvej, the Expanse or the Territory of Aryans/Iranian].

(5). The first of *the* good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the Airyana Vaeja, by the Vanguhi Daitya [good river Daitya].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu [Ahriman, the evil spirit], who is all death, and he counter-created the serpent in the river and Winter, a work of the Daevas [Demons].

(9). There are ten winter months there, two summer months; and

those are cold for the waters, cold for the earth, cold for the trees. Winter falls there, the worst of its plagues.

(13). The second of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the plain which the Sughdhas inhabit [Old Persian: Suguda; Sogdiana, land lying between the Oxus River (Amu Darya) to the south and Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) to the north with its heartland being the valleys of Zarafshan and the Kashka Darya].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the locust, which brings death unto cattle and plants.

6 (17). The third of the good lands and countries, which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the strong, holy Môuru [Margu; Marv or Merv in present-day southern Turkmenistan].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft sinful lusts.

7 (21). The fourth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the beautiful Bakhdhi [Bactria; Balkh: the core territory of ancient Bactria corresponded with present-day northern Afghanistan] with high-lifted banners.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the ants and the ant-hills.

8 (25). The fifth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Nisâya [Nisa in present-day Turkmenistan, which served as the first capital of the Arsacid/Parthian dynasty] that lies between Mouru and Bâkhdhi.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-acted the sin of unbelief.

9 (29). The sixth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Harôyu [Old Persian: Haraiva; Areia or Aria; the basin of the Hari River; Herat in present-day northwestern Afghanistan] with its lake.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created tears and wailing.

10 (33). The seventh of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Vaêkereta [Kapul; Kabul in present-day Afghanistan], of the evil shadows.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft the Pairika Knãthaiti, who clave unto Keresâspa.

11 (37). The eighth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Urva of the rich pastures [Mêshan or Mesene, the region of lower Euphrates, corresponding with Kuwait and southern Iraq].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the sin of pride.

12 (41). The ninth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Khne*n*ta which the Vehrkânas inhabit [Varkana; Hyrcania; present-day Gorgan in northern Iran on the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created a sin for which there is no atonement, the unnatural sin.

13 (45). The tenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the beautiful Harahvaiti.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft a sin for which there is no atonement, the burying of the dead.

14 (49). The eleventh of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the bright, glorious Haêtuma*n*t [the basin of the Erymanthus; now Helmend].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the evil work of witchcraft.

16 (59). The twelfth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Ragha [Ray south of modern Tehran in northern Iran] of the three races.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the sin of utter unbelief.

17 (63). The thirteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the strong, holy *K*akhra.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created a sin for which there is no atonement, the cooking of corpses.

18 (67). The fourteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the four-cornered Varena, [Gilan, present-day Caspian provinces of northern Iran] for which was born Thraêtaona [Fereydun], who smote A*z*i Dahâka [Zahhak].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created abnormal issues in women and barbarian oppression.

19 (72). The fifteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the Seven Rivers [the modern Panjab or the Five Rivers].

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created abnormal issues in women and excessive heat.

20 (76). The sixteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the land by the sources (?) of Rangha [Roman Mesopotamia, the basin of the upper Tigris], where people live who have no chiefs.

Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created Winter, a work of the Daêvas [Demons].

21 (81). There are still other lands and countries, beautiful and deep, longing and asking for the good, and bright.

Source: *The Zend-Avesta, Part I: The Vendidad; Fargard I,* translated by James Darmesteter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), 4–10.

3. VENERATION OF NATURAL FORCES: HYMN TO THE RIVER GODDESS AREDVI SURA ANAHITA

*Ancient Iranians venerated natural forces. They worshipped the sun, water, rain, etc., as the most essential elements of life on Earth. The goddess of waters, Anahita, "the wide-expanding, the health-giving," "the life-increasing," "the herd-increasing," "the fold-increasing," "the wealth-increasing," and "the country-increasing" deity, was the creation of the great god Ahura Mazda and therefore worthy of sacrifice and worship (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II: *Aban Yasht, 1). She made "the womb of all females pure for bringing forth," made "all females bring forth in safety," and put "milk into the breasts of all females in the right measure and the right quality" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II: *Aban Yasht, 2). Streams, rivers, lakes, and seas were therefore venerated, and polluting them was considered to be a sinful act. The hymn to the river goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita reveals the deep respect and adoration of ancient Iranians for natural forces, particularly the waters.*

(1) Aredvi Sura Anahita, increasing corn, just, increasing herds, just, increasing possessions, just. … (3) immense, far-famed, who is as great in her immensity as all these waters which flow forth upon the earth; who, mighty, flows forth from Mount Hukairya upon the sea Vourukasha—all the edges of the sea Vourukasha are turbulent, all the middle is turbulent, as Aredvi Sura Anahita pours forth upon them. … (5) The outflow of that one sea will pour forth over all the seven regions. She pours down her waters summer and winter alike. She purifies the waters, she purifies the seed of males, the womb of females, the milk of females. … (132) Through this sacrifice, through this prayer … descend again, O Aredvi Sura Anahita, from those stars to the Ahura-created earth, to the worshipping priest with cupped hands overflowing, for help to the libation bringer.

Source: Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 33. Reprinted with permission.

4. HYMN TO THE SHINING SUN

Ancient Iranians venerated natural forces. They revered the sun and water as the most essential elements of life on Earth. They recognized that plants, animals, and human beings could not live without the heat and light of the sun and the sustenance provided by water. In the Iranian cosmology the sun god Mithra, "the lord of wide pastures," who had "a thousand ears

*and ten thousand eyes," had been created by the great god Ahura Mazda (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II: *Mihr Yasht, 1). Mithra was also worshipped as the god of covenants and oaths. He was a great divinity "worthy of sacrifice" and "worthy of prayer" (*The Zend-Avesta, Part II: *Mihr Yasht, 4, 5). The excerpt below, taken from the hymn to the "Shining Sun," Hvar Khshaeta, demonstrates the deep respect and adoration that ancient Iranians showed to natural forces, particularly the sun.*

1. We worship the Shining Sun, life-giving, bountiful. … When the sun with his light brings warmth, when the sun as light brings warmth, the invisible gods stand there, a hundred and a thousand.

2. That glory … of his they gather up, that glory of his they bring down, that glory of his they distribute over the Ahura-created earth, to prosper the world of asha. … (2) When the Sun rises, the Ahura-created earth is purified, a running water is purified. … (30) And if the Sun were not to rise, then demons would destroy all that is in the seven regions. Not one of the invisible gods would find a place to abide or stay in this material world. (4) He who sacrifices to the Shining Sun, life-giving, bountiful, … in order to resist darkness, in order to resist demons born of darkness … he rejoices all the invisible and visible gods.

Source: Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 31–32. Reprinted with permission.

5. EXCERPT FROM PLUTARCH'S "ISIS AND OSIRIS" DESCRIBING THE TEACHINGS OF ZARATHUSTRA

In his essay "Isis and Osiris," which is contained in his Moralia, *the Greek author Plutarch (46–119 CE) wrote about the teachings of Zarathustra (Zoroaster), referring to the Iranian prophet as a sage who taught a form of dualism based on the struggle between a god of good and an evil god, calling the former Oromazes (Ohrmazd/Ahura Mazda) and the latter Areimanius (Ahriman/Angra Mainyu). Plutarch's interpretation of the teachings of Zarathustra reflects the impact of Zurvanism, a Zoroastrian heresy that was articulated, cultivated, and fostered by some Iranian magi. According to Zurvanism, Ahura Mazda, the god who had created everything that was good, and Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), or the evil spirit, were the twin sons of a supreme god, the god of time, who was called Zurvan. The heresy was widespread during the Sasanian period among all strata of society, including the powerful members of the Persian nobility. The excerpt below from "Isis and Osiris" also provides valuable information about how Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism were perceived by Greek and Roman biographers.*

46. The great majority and the wisest of men hold this opinion: they believe that there are two gods, rivals as it were, the one the Artificer of good and the other of evil. There are also those who call the better one a god and the other a daemon [demon], as for example, Zoroaster the sage, who, they record lived five thousand years before the time of the Trojan War. He called the one Oromazes [Ohrmazd/Ahura Mazda] and the other Areimanius [Angra Mainyu/Ahriman]; and he further declared that among all the things perceptible to the senses, Oromazes may best be compared to light, and Areimanius, conversely, to darkness and ignorance, and midway between the two is Mithras; for this reason the Persians give to Mithras the name of "Mediator." Zoroaster has also taught that men should make votive offerings and thank-offerings to Oromazes, and averting and mourning offerings to Areimanius. They pound up in a mortar a certain plant called omomi, and at the same time invoking Hades and Darkness; then they mix it with the blood of a wolf that has been sacrificed, and carry it out and cast it into a place where the sun never shines. In fact, they believe that some of the plants belong to the good god and others to the evil daemon; so also of the animals they think that dogs, fowls, and hedge-hogs, for example, belong to the good god, but that water-rats belong to the evil one; therefore the man who was killed the most of these they hold to be fortune.

47. However, they also tell many fabulous stories about their gods, such, for example, as the following: Oromazes, born from the purest light, and Areimanius, born from the darkness, are constantly at war with each other; and Oromazes created six gods, the first of Good Thought, the second of Truth, the third of Order, and, of the rest, one of Wisdom, one of Wealth, and one the Artificer of Pleasure in what is Honourable. But Areimanius created rivals, as it were, equal to these in number. Then Oromazes enlarged himself to thrice his former size, and removed himself as far distant from the Earth, and adorned the heavens with stars. One star he set there before all others as a guardian and watchman, the Dog-star, Twenty-four other gods he created and placed in an egg. But those created by Areimanius, who were equal in number to the others, pierced through the egg and made their way inside; hence evils are now combined with good. But a destined time shall come when it is decreed that Areimanius, engaged in bringing on pestilence and famine, shall by these be utterly annihilated and shall disappear; and then shall the earth become a level plain, and there shall be one manner of life and one form of government for a blessed people who shall all speak one tongue.

Source: Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris,* translated by Frank Cole Babitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 111–115.

6. DESCRIPTION OF THE RISE OF MEDIA DURING THE REIGN OF KING CYAXARES FROM HERODOTUS'S *HISTORIES*

The Medes established the first Iranian Empire on the Iranian plateau. The origins of the Median state and the events that led to the emergence of the Median kingdom are shrouded in mystery. The Medes were a branch of Iranian-speaking people who settled in the western regions of present-day Iran, most probably sometime during the second millennium BCE. Evidence regarding the origins of the Medes and the internal organization of their society is meager. Archaeological excavations at Median sites in western Iran have so far produced valuable but scanty results. The Assyrian royal inscriptions as well as Babylonian chronicles throw some light on isolated events and encounters between the Medes and their neighbors but do not provide any clear outline of Median history, politics, and social organization. Perhaps the most coherent description of the rise of the Median kingdom is provided by the Greek author Herodotus in his Histories. *Herodotus's account of Median history is, however, riddled with legendary accounts and fictitious stories. Nevertheless, as the only cohesive narrative about the rulers of the Median kingdom, it remains an important historical source. The excerpt below, taken from Herodotus's* Histories, *describes the emergence of the Median Empire during the reign of Cyaxares, who according to this account was the grandson of Deioces, the founder of the Median state and the son of the Median monarch Phraortes.*

103. When Phraortes had brought his life to an end, Kyaxares [Cyaxares] the son of Phraortes, the son of Deïokes [Deioces], received the power. This king is said to have been yet much more warlike than his forefathers; and he first banded the men of Asia into separate divisions, that is to say, he first arrayed apart from one another the spearmen and the archers and the horsemen, for before that time they were all mingled together without distinction. This was he who fought with the Lydians when the day became night as they fought, and who also united under his rule the whole of Asia above the river Halys. And having gathered together all his subjects he marched upon Nineveh to avenge his father, and also because he desired to conquer that city. And when he had fought a battle with the Assyrians and had defeated them, while he was sitting down before Nineveh there came upon him a great army of Scythians, and the leader of them was Madyas the son of Protohyas [Protothyas], king of the Scythians. These had invaded Asia after driving the Kimmerians [Cimmerians] out of Europe, and in pursuit of them as they fled they had come to the land of Media. …

106. For eight-and-twenty years then the Scythians were rulers of Asia, and by their unruliness and reckless behaviour everything was

ruined; for on the one hand they exacted that in tribute from each people which they laid upon them, and apart from the tribute they rode about and carried off by force the possessions of each tribe. Then Kyaxares with the Medes, having invited the greater number of them to a banquet, made them drunk and slew them; and thus the Medes recovered their power, and had rule over the same nations as before; and they also took Nineveh,—the manner how it was taken I shall set forth in another history,—and made the Assyrians subject to them excepting only the land of Babylon.

107. After this Kyaxares died, having reigned forty years including those years during which the Scythians had rule, and Astyages son of Kyaxares received from him the kingdom.

Source: Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus,* Vol. 1, Book 1.103, translated by G. C. Macaulay (New York: Macmillan, 1890).

7. DESCRIPTION FROM THE BABYLONIAN CHRONICLES OF THE CONQUEST OF THE ASSYRIAN CAPITAL, NINEVEH, BY THE MEDES AND BABYLONIANS

The fall of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian state, in 612 BCE was a momentous event in the history of the ancient world. It marked the destruction of a powerful empire, which had dominated the political life of the ancient Near East for several centuries, as well as the emergence of the first major Iranian state in the ancient Near East. In the autumn of 615 BCE, the Medes crossed the Zagros Mountains of western Iran and captured Arrapha, present-day Kirkuk in northern Iraq. Then in the summer of 614 BCE the Median monarch Huvakhshtra, who appears as Cyaxares in Herodotus's Histories, *captured Tarbisu, northwest of Ashur, and proceeded to sack Ashur, the first capital of the Assyrian state. The king of Babylonia, who had reached Ashur with his army after it had been seized and destroyed by the Medes, met with the king of the Medes outside the city, where the two monarchs agreed to a treaty of peace and friendship. In the summer of 612 BCE, the Medes joined forces with the Neo-Babylonian Empire and stormed Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. After a long siege and several fierce battles, the city was finally captured. The fall of Nineveh was a deathblow to the Assyrian state. The Assyrian state ceased to exist, and its territory was divided between the Babylonians and the Medes. The following account of the fall of Nineveh is from the Babylonian chronicles.*

The king of Akkad cal[led up] his army and [Cyaxar]es, the king of the Manda hordes [Medes] marched towards the king of Akkad. … They met each other. The King of Akkad and [Cyaxar]es. [the …] he

ferried across and they marched (upstream) on the embankment of the Tigris and … [pitched camp] against Nineveh. … From the month Simanu till the month Abu, three ba[ttles were fought, then] they made a great attack against the city. In the month Abu, [the … th day, the city was seized and a great defeat] he inflicted [upon the] entire [population]. On that day, Sinsharishkun, king of Assy[ria fled to] … , many prisoners of the city, beyond counting, they carried away. The city [they turned] into ruin-hills and hea[ps (of debris). The king] and the army of Assyria escaped (however) before the king (of Akkad) and [the army] of the king of Akkad. … In the month Ululu, the 20th day, Cyaxares and his army returned to his country. Afterwards, the king of A[kkad] … marched as far as Nisibis. Booty and *gu-lu-tu* of … and (of) the country Rusapu they brought to the king of Akkad, to Nineveh. [In the month] … Ashuruballit … sat down in Harran upon the throne to become king of Assyria. Till the month … [the king of Akkad stayed] in Nineveh. … From the 20th day of the month [Tashritu] the king [of Akkad] … in the same month of Tashritu in the town. …

Source: James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971), 202–203. Reprinted with permission.

8. A NEO-BABYLONIAN INSCRIPTION DESCRIBING THE CONQUEST OF BABYLON BY CYRUS II THE GREAT

In 539 BCE Cyrus II (Kurush II), the king of Anshan in the present-day province of Fars in southern Iran, marched against Babylon. Cyrus had already conquered the kingdoms of Media and Lydia as well as vast territories in Central Asia. After these conquests Cyrus moved against Nabonidus, the ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Cyrus first attacked and captured the city of Opis on the banks of the Tigris not far from present-day Baghdad. Cyrus followed this victory by seizing Sippar (present-day Tell Abu Habbah near modern-day Baghdad), which surrendered without a battle. As Cyrus and his army descended on Babylon, Nabonidus fled, allowing the army of Cyrus to capture the city without resistance. After his army had secured the city, Cyrus entered Babylon. To emphasize the significance he attached to this victory, the Persian monarch took the title "King of Babylon," the king of the land, and appointed governors. He also expressed his deference and respect for the city's diverse communities and their gods. The following document, a Neo-Babylonian inscription, describes the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus II the Great.

… In the month of Tashritu, when Cyrus attacked the army of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris, the inhabitants of Akkad revolted, but he

(*Nabonidus*) massacred the confused inhabitants. The 14th day, Sippar was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled. The 16th day, Gobryas (*Ugbaru*), the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. Afterwards Nabonidus was arrested in Babylon when he returned (there). Till the end of the month, the shield(-carrying) Gutians were staying within Esagila (but) nobody carried arms in Esagila and its (pertinent) buildings, the correct time (for a ceremony) was not missed. In the month of Arahshamnu, the 3rd day, Cyrus entered Babylon, green twigs were spread in front of him—the state of "Peace" (*šulmu*) was imposed upon the city. Cyrus sent greetings to all Babylon, Gobryas, his governor, installed (sub-) governors. … From the month of Kislimu to the month of Addaru, the gods of Akkad which Nabonidus had made come down to Babylon … returned to their sacred cities. In the month of Arahshamnu, on the night of the 11th day, Gobryas died. In the month of [Arahshamnu, the … th day, the wi]fe of the king died. From the 27th day of Arahshamnu till the 3rd day of Nisanu a(n official) "weeping" was performed in Akkad, all the people (went around) with their hair disheveled. When, the 4th day, Cambyses, son of Cyrus, went to the temple the priest of Nebo who … the bull … they came (and) made the "weaving" by means of the *handles* and when [he le]d the image of Ne[bo … sp]ears and leather quivers, from … Nebo returned to Esagila, sheep-offerings in front of Bel and the god *Mârbîti.*

Source: James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971), 204. Reprinted with permission.

9. EXCERPTS FROM THE CYRUS CYLINDER DISCOVERED IN BABYLON IN 1879

In 1879, the Assyrian-born archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam (1826–1910) discovered the Cyrus Cylinder in Babylon in southern Iraq within the sanctuary of the chief Babylonian god, Marduk. On this clay cylinder, which was inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform, Cyrus introduced himself as the son of Cambyses (Kambujiya), grandson of Cyrus (Kurush), and a descendant of Teispes (Chishpish), who were all kings of Anshan. Anshan was located in the present-day southern Iranian province of Fars. Cyrus also described his conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE and the capture of Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, a feat he claimed he had achieved with the aid of Marduk, the god of Babylon. Cyrus stated that he had entered Babylon in peace, declaring his respect for Marduk and expressing his commitment to allowing people to practice their religion freely. Today, the Cyrus clay cylinder is kept in the British Museum in London. Beginning in March 2013, the cylinder traveled to several cities in

the United States, starting in Washington, D.C., and completing its journey in Los Angeles, home of the largest Persian-speaking community in North America.

12. … He took the hand of Cyrus, king of the city of Anshan, and called him by his name, proclaiming him aloud for the kingship over all of everything.

13. He made the land of Guti and all the Median troops prostrate themselves at his feet, while he shepherded in justice and righteousness the black-headed people

14. whom he had put under his care. Marduk, the great lord, who nurtures his people, saw with pleasure his fine deeds and true heart,

15. and ordered that he should go to Babylon. He had him take the road to Tintir (Babylon), and, like a friend and companion, he walked at his side.

16. His vast troops whose number, like the water in a river, could not be counted, were marching fully-armed at his side.

17. He had him enter without fighting or battle right into Shuanna; he saved his city Babylon from hardship. He handed over to him Nabonidus, the king who did not fear him.

18. All the people of Tintir, of all Sumer and Akkad, nobles and governors, bowed down before him and kissed his feet, rejoicing over his kingship and their faces shone.

19. The lord through whose help all were rescued from death and who saved them all from distress and hardship, they blessed him sweetly and praised his name.

20. I am Cyrus, king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world,

21. son of Cambyses, the great king, king of the city of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, the great king, ki[ng of the ci]ty of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, the great king, king of the city of Anshan,

22. the perpetual seed of kingship, whose reign Bel (Marduk) and Nabu love, and with whose kingship, to their joy, they concern themselves. When I went as harbinger of peace i[nt]o Babylon

23. I founded my sovereign residence within the palace amid celebration and rejoicing. Marduk, the great lord, bestowed on me as my destiny the great magnanimity of one who loves Babylon, and I every day sought him out in awe.

24. My vast troops were marching peaceably in Babylon, and the whole of [Sumer] and Akkad had nothing to fear.

25. I sought the safety of the city of Babylon and all its sanctuaries. As for the population of Babylon [… , w]ho as if without div[ine intention] had endured a yoke not decreed for them,

26. I soothed their weariness; I freed them from their bonds(?). Marduk, the great lord, rejoiced at [my good] deeds,

27. and he pronounced a sweet blessing over me, Cyrus, the king who fears him, and over Cambyses, the son [my] issue, [and over] all my troops,

28. that we might live happily in his presence, in well-being. At his exalted command, all kings who sit on thrones,

29. from every quarter, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, those who inhabit [remote distric]ts (and) the kings of the land of Amurru who live in tents, all of them,

30. brought their weighty tribute into Shuanna, and kissed my feet. From [Shuanna] I sent back to their places to the city of Ashur and Susa,

31. Akkad, the land of Eshnunna, the city of Zamban, the city of Meturnu, Der, as far as the border of the land of Guti—the sanctuaries across the river Tigris—whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated,

32. the gods who lived therein, and made permanent sanctuaries for them. I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements,

33. and the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad which Nabonidus—to the fury of the lord of the gods—had brought into Shuanna, at the command of Marduk, the great lord,

34. I returned them unharmed to their cells, in the sanctuaries that make them happy. May all the gods that I returned to their sanctuaries,

35. every day before Bel and Nabu, ask for a long life for me, and mention my good deeds, and say to Marduk, my lord, this: “Cyrus, the king who fears you, and Cambyses his son,

36. may they be the provisioners of our shrines until distant (?) days, and the population of Babylon call blessings on my kingship. I have enabled all the lands to live in peace.” Every day I increased by [… ge]ese, two ducks and ten pigeons the [former offerings] of geese, ducks and pigeons.

37. I strove to strengthen the defences of the wall Imgur-Enlil, the great wall of Babylon,

38. and [I completed] the quay of baked brick on the bank of the moat which an earlier king had bu[ilt but not com]pleted its work. …

Source: Robert William Rogers, trans., *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1912).

10. CYRUS II THE GREAT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: PASSAGES FROM THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND ISAIAH

After his conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, Cyrus II the Great (Kurush) liberated approximately 60,000 Jews who had lived in captivity in Babylon since the sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE and allowed them to return to Palestine. He also issued an edict authorizing the repair and reconstruction of the dilapidated Jerusalem Temple. Some 40,000 Jews, accompanied by a Persian official specially commissioned to see that the royal orders were executed, left Babylon for Palestine in 537 BCE. Soon after they had returned, the Jewish community began the process of building the Jewish Temple in accordance with what was written in the Law of Moses. The Persian king Cyrus II the Great is recognized in the Old Testament as the Lord’s anointed. The two short excerpts from the book of Ezra and the book of Isaiah recount the actions of Cyrus regarding the Jewish population of Babylon after the Persian conquest of the city.

8A

Cyrus in the Book of Ezra (Ezra 1.1–2.3)

1

1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared:

2 “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.

3 Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem;

4 and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.”

5 The heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites—everyone whose spirit God had stirred—got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

6 All their neighbors aided them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with animals, and with valuable gifts, besides all that was freely offered.

7 King Cyrus himself brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.

8 King Cyrus of Persia had them released into the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

9 And this was the inventory: gold basins, thirty; silver basins, one thousand; knives, twenty-nine;

10 gold bowls, thirty; other silver bowls, four hundred ten; other vessels, one thousand;

11 the total of the gold and silver vessels was five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar brought up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

2

1 Now these were the people of the province who came from those captive exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia; they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, all to their own towns. …

Source: Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible,* New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 582–583. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cyrus in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 44:24–45:17)

24 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth;

25 who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners; who turns back the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish;

26 who confirms the word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, “It shall be inhabited,” and of the cities of Judah, “They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins”;

27 who says to the deep, “Be dry—I will dry up your rivers”;

28 who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose”; and who says of Jerusalem, “It shall be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”

45

1 Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed:

2 I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,

3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name

4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.

5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me,

6 so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west,

that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.

7 I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things.

8 Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the Lord have created it.

9 Woe to you who strive with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter! Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, “What are you making”? or “Your work has no handles”?

10 Woe to anyone who says to a father, “What are you begetting”? or to a woman, “With what are you in labor”?

11 Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?

12 I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.

13 I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the Lord of hosts.

14 Thus says the Lord: The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, tall of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying, “God is with you alone, and there is no other; there is no God besides him.”

15 Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.

16 All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together.

17 But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. …

Source: Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible,* New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 927–929. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and

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11. INSCRIPTION OF DARIUS I AT BISOTUN

The Persian Achaemenid Empire reached the zenith of its power during the reign of Darius I (Darayavaush I), who ruled from 522 to 486 BCE. Darius was an officer in the army of king Cambyses II. While Cambyses was completing his conquest of Egypt in 522 BCE, a man claiming to be Bardiya, Cambyses's brother, revolted and proclaimed himself king. Cambyses rushed home to quell the uprising but died suddenly en route in Syria. Meanwhile, the man claiming to be Bardiya seized the throne and proclaimed himself the new ruler. The new king was opposed by a group of seven Persian officers, which included Darius. Darius claimed that the man who had seized the throne could not be Bardiya, because Cambyses had ordered the murder of his brother before leaving for Egypt. According to Darius, the new claimant to the throne was not the brother of the king but instead was a magian, or priest, named Gaumata. Denouncing the new king as a false pretender, Darius and his fellow officers attacked Bardiya/Gaumata in Media and killed him. The elimination of Bardiya/Gaumata allowed Darius to proclaim himself king. Shortly after Darius ascended the throne, mass uprisings erupted throughout the empire. After suppressing these revolts, Darius I ordered a trilingual inscription to be incised on a rock in Bisotun on the highway connecting Iran to Mesopotamia. In this inscription, the Achaemenid king named the individuals who had revolted against his authority and how he and his commanders had suppressed them. The inscription was written in Babylonian, Aramaic, and Old Persian. The complete text of the inscription, translated from the Old Persian, appears in the document below.

Note on translation: *Throughout the document below, the name of the god, "Auramazda," has been changed to the more established transliteration, "Ahuramazda." Also, the text below has been compared to the translation of the Bisotun Inscription by Ronald G. Kent (*Old Persian Grammar Texts Lexicon *[New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950], 116–134). Wherever necessary, alternative text has been added from Kent's version in brackets.*

[1.1] I (am) Darius, the great king, the king of kings, the king in Persia, the king of countries, the son of Hystaspes, the grandson of Arsames, the Achaemenid.

[1.2] Says Darius the king: My father (is) Hystaspes, the father of Hystaspes (is) Arsames, the father of Arsames (is) Ariaramnes, the father of Ariaramnes (is Teispes), the father of Teispes (is) Achaemenes.

[1.3] Says Darius the king: Therefore we are called the Achaemenids; from long ago we have extended; from long ago our family have been kings.

[1.4] Says Darius the king: 8 of my family (there were) who were formerly kings; I am the ninth (9); long aforetime we were (lit. are) kings.

[1.5] Says Darius the king: By the grace of Ahuramazda I am king; Ahuramazda gave me the kingdom.

[1.6] Says Darius the king: These are the countries which came to me; by the grace of Ahuramazda I became king of them; Persia, Susiana [Elam], Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the (lands) which are on the sea, Sparda, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandara, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, Maka; in all (there are) 23 countries.

[1.7] Says Darius the king: These (are) the countries which came to me; by the grace of Ahuramazda they became subject to me; they bore tribute to me; what was commanded to them by me this was done night and (lit. or) day.

[1.8] Says Darius the king: Within these countries what man was watchful, him who should be well esteemed I esteemed; who was an enemy, him who should be well punished I punished; by the grace of Ahuramazda these countries respected my laws; as it was commanded by me to them, so it was done.

[1.9] Says Darius the king: Ahuramazda gave me this kingdom; Ahuramazda bore me aid until I obtained this kingdom; by the grace of Ahuramazda I hold this kingdom.

[1.10] Says Darius the king: This (is) what (was) done by me after that I became king; Cambyses by name, the son of Cyrus (was) of our family; he was king here; of this Cambyses there was a brother Bardiya (i.e., Smerdis) by name possessing a common mother and the same father with Cambyses; afterwards Cambyses slew that Bardiya; when Cambyses slew Bardiya, it was not known to the people that Bardiya was slain; afterwards Cambyses went to Egypt; when Cambyses went to Egypt, after that the people became hostile; after that there was Deceit to a great extent in the provinces, both in Persia and in Media and in the other provinces.

[1.11] Says Darius the king: Afterwards there was one man, a Magian, Gaumata by name; he rose up from Paishiyauvada; there (is) a

mountain Arakadrish by name; from there—14 days in the month Viyakhna were in course when he rose up; he thus deceived the people; I am Bardiya the son of Cyrus brother of Cambyses; afterwards all the people became estranged from Cambyses (and) went over to him, both Persia and Media and the other provinces; he seized the kingdom; 9 days in the month Garmapada were in course—he thus seized the kingdom; afterwards Cambyses died by a self-imposed death.

[1.12] Says Darius the king: This kingdom which Gaumata the Magian took from Cambyses, this kingdom from long ago was (the possession) of our family; afterwards Gaumata the Magian took from Cambyses both Persia and Media and the other provinces; he seized (the power) and made it his own possession; he became king.

[1.13] Says Darius the king: There was not a man neither a Persian nor a Median nor any one of our family who could make Gaumata the Magian deprived of the kingdom; the people feared his tyranny; (they feared) he would slay the many who knew Bardiya formerly; for this reason he would slay the people; "that they might not know me that I am not Bardiya the son of Cyrus;" any one did not dare to say anything against Gaumata the Magian until I came; afterwards I asked Ahuramazda for help; Ahuramazda bore me aid; 10 days in the month Bagayadish were in course I thus with few men slew that Gaumata the Magian and what men were his foremost allies; there (is) a stronghold Sikayauvatish by name; there is a province in Media, Nisaya by name; here I smote him; I took the kingdom from him; by the grace of Ahuramazda I became king; Ahuramazda gave me the kingdom.

[1.14] Says Darius the king: The kingdom which was taken away from our family, this I put in (its) place; I established it on (its) foundation; as (it was) formerly so I made it; the sanctuaries which Gaumata the Magian destroyed I restored; for the people the revenue(?) and the personal property and the estates and the royal residences which Gaumata the Magian took from them (I restored); I established the state on (its) foundation, both Persia and Media and the other provinces; as (it was) formerly, so I brought back what (had been) taken away; by the grace of Ahuramazda this I did; I labored that our royal house I might establish in (its) place; as (it was) formerly, so (I made it); I labored by the grace of Ahuramazda that Gaumata the Magian might not take away our royal house.

[1.15] Says Darius the king: This (is) what I did, after that I became king.

[1.16] Says Darius the king: When I slew Gaumata the Magian, afterwards there (was) one man Atrina [Achina] by name, the son of Upadara(n)ma; he rose up in Susiana [Elam]; thus he said to the people; I am king in Susiana; afterwards the people of Susiana became rebellious (and) went over to that Atrina; he became king in Susiana; and there (was) one man a Babylonian Nidintu-Bel by name, the son of Aniri', he rose up in Babylon; thus he deceived the people; I am Nebuchadrezzar the son of Nabu-na'id [Nabonidus]; afterwards the whole of the Babylonian state went over to that Nidintu-Bel; Babylon became rebellious; the kingdom in Babylon he seized.

[1.17] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I sent forth (my army) to Susiana; this Atrina was led to me bound; I slew him.

[1.18] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I went to Babylon against that Nidintu-Bel who called himself Nebuchadrezzar; the army of Nidintu-Bel held the Tigris; there he halted and thereby was a flotilla; afterwards I placed my army on floats of skins; one part I set on camels, for the other I brought horses; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda we crossed the Tigris; there the army of Nidintu-Bel I smote utterly; 26 days in the month Atriyadiya were in course—we thus engaged in battle.

[1.19] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I went to Babylon; when I had not reached Babylon—there (is) a town Zazana by name along the Euphrates—there this Nidintu-Bel who called himself Nebuchadrezzar went with his army against me to engage in battle; afterwards we engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda the army of Nidintu-Bel I smote utterly; the enemy were driven into the water; the water bore them away; 2 days in the month Anamaka were in course—we thus engaged in battle.

[2.1] Says Darius the king: Afterwards Nidintu-Bel with (his) few horsemen went to Babylon; afterwards I went to Babylon; by the grace of Ahuramazda I both seized Babylon and seized that Nidintu-Bel; afterwards I slew that Nidintu-Bel at Babylon.

[2.2] Says Darius the king: While I was in Babylon, these (are) the provinces which became estranged from me, Persia, Susiana, Media, Assyria, Egypt, Parthia, Margiana, Sattagydia, Scythia.

[2.3] Says Darius the king: There (was) one man Martiya by name, the son of Cicikhrish [Cincikhri]—there (is) a town in Persia Kuganaka by name—here he dwelt; he rose up in Susiana; thus he said to the people; I am Imanish king in Susiana.

[2.4] Says Darius the king: Then I was on the march to Susiana; afterwards the Susians [feared] me; they seized that Martiya who was chief of them and slew him.

[2.5] Says Darius the king: One man Phraortes, he rose up in Media; thus he said to the people; [I am Khshathrita] of the family of Cyaxares; afterwards the Median people which [were in the palace] became estranged from me (and) went over to that Phraortes; he became [king] in Media.

[2.6] Says Darius the king: The Persian and the Median army, which was by me, it was small; afterwards I sent forth an army; Hydarnes by name, a Persian, my subject, him I made chief of them; thus I said to them; go, smite that Median army which does not call itself mine; afterwards this Hydarnes with the army went away; when he came to Media—there (is) a town in Media Marush by name—here he engaged in battle with the Medes; he who was the chief among the Medes did not there [withstand]; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 27 days in the month Anamaka were in course—the battle (was) thus fought by them; afterwards my army—there (is) a region Ka(m)pada by name—there awaited me until I went to Media.

[2.7] Says Darius the king: Dadarshish [Dadarshi] by name, an Armenian, my subject, him I sent forth to Armenia; thus I said to him; go, the rebellious army which does not call itself mine, smite it; afterwards Dadarshish went away; when he came to Armenia, afterwards the rebels came together (and) went against Dadarshish to engage in battle; there is a village Zuzza by name in Armenia—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 8 days in the month Thuravahara were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them.

[2.8] Says Darius the king: A second time the rebels came together (and) went against Dadarshish to engage in battle; there (is) a stronghold, Tigra by name, in Armenia—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda, my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 18 days in the month Thuravahara were in course—the battle (was) thus fought by them.

[2.9] Says Darius the king: A third time the rebels came together (and) went against Dadarshish to engage in battle; there (is) a stronghold, U[yam]a by name, in Armenia—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my

army smote that rebellious army utterly; 9 days in the month Thaigarcish were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them; afterwards Dadarshish awaited me in Armenia until I came to Media.

[2.10] Says Darius the king: Afterwards Vaumisa by name, a Persian, my subject, him I sent forth to Armenia; thus I said to him; go, the rebellious army which does not call itself mine, smite it; afterwards Vaumisa went away; when he came to Armenia, afterwards the rebels came together (and) went against Vaumisa to engage in battle; there (is) a region I[zar] by name, in Assyria—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 15 days in the month Anamaka were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them.

[2.11] Says Darius the king: A second time the rebels came together (and) went against Vaumisa to engage in battle; there (is) a region Autiyara by name in Armenia—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; at the end of the month Thuravahara—thus the battle (was) fought by them; afterwards Vaumisa awaited me in Armenia until I came to Media.

[2.12] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I went from Babylon; I went away to Media; when I went to Media—there (is) a town Ku(n)durush by name in Media—here this Phraortes who called himself king in Media went with (his) army against me to engage in battle; afterwards we engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda I smote the army of Phraortes utterly; 25 days in the month Adukanisha were in course—we thus engaged in battle.

[2.13] Says Darius the king: Afterwards this Phraortes with a few horsemen fled; there is a region Raga by name in Media—along there he went; afterwards I sent forth my army in pursuit; Phraortes was seized (and) led to me; I cut off (his) nose and ears and tongue, and I put out his eyes; he was held bound at my court; all the people saw him; afterwards I put him on a cross at Ecbatana, and what men were his foremost allies, these I threw within a prison at Ecbatana.

[2.14] Says Darius the king: One man, Citra(n)takhma by name, a Sagartian, he became rebellious to me; thus he said to the people; I am king in Sagartia, of the family of Cyaxares; afterwards I sent forth the Persian and the Median army; Takhmaspada by name, a Mede, my subject, him I made chief of them, thus I said to them; go, the rebellious army, which does not call itself mine, smite it; afterwards Takhmaspada went away with the army (and) engaged in battle with

Citra(n)takhma; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly and seized Citra(n)takhma (and) brought (him) to me; afterwards I cut off his nose and ears, and put out his eyes; he was held bound at my court; all the people saw him; afterwards I put him on a cross in Arbela.

[2.15] Says Darius the king: This (is) what (was) done by me in Media.

[2.16] Says Darius the king: Parthia and Hyrcania became rebellious to me and declared allegiance to Phraortes; my father Hystaspes, he was [in Parthia]; the people abandoned him (and) became rebellious; afterwards Hystaspes [went with his army] which was loyal; there is a town Vish[pa]uz[a]tish [Vishpauzati] by name [in Parthia]—here he engaged in battle with the Parthians; Ahuramazda [bore] me [aid]; by the grace of Ahuramazda Hystaspes smote that rebellious army utterly; [22 days] in the month Viyakhna were in course—thus the battle was fought by them.

[3.1] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I sent forth the Persian army to Hystaspes from Raga; when this army came to Hystaspes afterwards Hystaspes took that army (and) went away; there (is) a town Patigrabana by name in Parthia—here he engaged in battle with the rebels; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda Hystaspes smote that rebellious army utterly; 1 day in the month Garmapada was in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them.

[3.2] Says Darius the king: Afterwards it became my province; this (is) what (was) done by me in Parthia.

[3.3] Says Darius the king: There (is) a region Margiana by name; it became rebellious to me; one man Frada, a Margian, him they made chief; afterwards I sent forth Dadarshish [Dadarshi] by name, a Persian, my subject, satrap in Bactria against him; thus I said to him; go, smite that army which does not call itself mine; afterwards Dadarshish with the army went away (and) engaged in battle with the Margians; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 23 days in the month Atriyadiya [Achiyadiya] were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them.

[3.4] Says Darius the king: Afterwards it became my province; this (is) what (was) done by me in Bactria.

[3.5] Says Darius the king: One man Vahyazdata by name; there (is) a

town Tarava by name; there (is) a region Yutiya [Yautiya] by name in Persia—here he dwelt; he was the second to rise against me in Persia; thus he said to the people; I am Bardiya the son of Cyrus; afterwards the Persian army which (was) in the palace cast aside their loyalty; they became estranged from me (and) went over to that Vahyazdata; he became king in Persia.

[3.6] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I sent forth the Persian and the Median army which was by me; Artavardiya by name, a Persian, my subject, him I made chief of them; the rest of the Persian army went with me to Media; afterwards Artavardiya with the army went to Persia; when he came to Persia—there (is) a town Rakha by name in Persia—here this Vahyazdata who called himself Bardiya went with (his) army against Artavardiya to engage in battle; afterwards they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that army of Vahyazdata utterly; 12 days in the month Thuravahara were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them.

[3.7] Says Darius the king: Afterwards this Vahyazdata with few horsemen fled (and) went to Paishiyauvada; from thence he took an army (and) again went against Artavardiya to engage in battle; there (is) a mountain Parga by name—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda gave me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that army of Vahyazdata utterly; 5 days in the month Garmapada were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them and they seized that Vahyazdata and what men were his foremost allies they seized.

[3.8] Says Darius the king: Afterwards—there (is) a town in Persia Uvadaicaya by name—here, that Vahyazdata and what men were his foremost allies, them I put on a cross.

[3.9] Says Darius the king: This (is) what (was) done by me in Persia.

[3.10] Says Darius the king: This Vahyazdata, who called himself Bardiya, he sent forth an army to Arachosia—there (was) Vivana by name, a Persian, my subject, satrap in Arachosia—against him (he sent an army) and one man he made chief of them; thus he said to them; go, smite Vivana and that army which calls itself of Darius the king; afterwards this army, which Vahyazdata sent forth, went against Vivana to engage in battle; there (is) a stronghold Kapishakanish by name—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 13 days in the month Anamaka were in course—thus the battle (was)

fought by them.

[3.11] Says Darius the king: Again the rebels came together (and) went against Vivana to engage in battle; there (is) a region Ga(n)dutava by name—here they engaged in battle; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army utterly; 7 days in the month Viyakhna were in course—thus the battle (was) fought by them.

[3.12] Says Darius the king: Afterwards this man, who was chief of that army which Vahyazdata sent against Vivana, he fled with a few horsemen (and) went away—there (is) a stronghold Arshada by name in Arachosia—he went thereby; afterwards Vivana, with an army went in pursuit of them; here he seized him and what men were his foremost allies he slew.

[3.13] Says Darius the king: Afterwards the province became mine; this (is) what (was) done by me in Arachosia.

[3.14] Says Darius the king: When I was in Persia and in Media, a second time the Babylonians became estranged from me; one man, Arakha by name, an Armenian son of Haldita, he rose up in Babylon; there (is) a region, Dubala by name—from here he thus lied to the people; I am Nebuchadrezzar, the son of Nabu-na'id; afterwards the Babylonian people became estranged from me (and) went over to that Arakha; he seized Babylon; he became king in Babylon.

[3.15] Says Darius the king: Afterwards I sent forth my army to Babylon; Intaphernes by name, a Persian, my subject, him I made chief of them; thus I said to them; go, smite that Babylonian army which does not call itself mine; afterwards Intaphernes with an army went to Babylon; Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the grace of Ahuramazda, Intaphernes smote the Babylonians; and [he led them bound to me]; 22 days in the month were in course—that Arakha, who called himself Nebuchadrezzar, and the men who [were his foremost allies they seized and bound]; [this Arakha] and what men were his foremost allies were put on crosses at Babylon.

[4.1] Says Darius the king: This (is) what was done by me in Babylon.

[4.2] Says Darius the king: This (is) what I did; by the grace of Ahuramazda it was (done) in every way; after that I became king, I engaged in 19 battles; by the grace of Ahuramazda I waged them and I seized 9 kings; there was one, Gaumata by name, a Magian; he lied; thus he said; I am Bardiya the son of Cyrus; he made Persia rebellious;

there (was) one, Atrina [Achina] by name, a Susian [Elamite]; he lied; thus he said; I am king in Susiana; he made Susiana rebellious to me; there (was) one, Nidintu-Bel by name, a Babylonian; he lied; thus he said; I am Nebuchadrezzar the son of Nabu-na'id; he made Babylon rebellious; there (was) one, Martiya by name, a Persian; he lied; thus he said; I am Imanish, king in Susiana; he made Susiana rebellious; there (was) one Phraortes by name, a Mede; he lied; thus he said; I am Khshathrita, of the family of Cyaxares; he made Media rebellious; there (was) one Citra(n)takhma by name, in Sagartia; he lied; thus he said; I am king in Sagartia, of the family of Cyaxares; he made Sagartia rebellious; there (was) one Frada by name, a Margian; he lied; thus he said; I am king in Margiana; he made Margiana rebellious; there (was) one, Vahyazdata by name, a Persian; he lied; thus he said; I am Bardiya the son of Cyrus; he made Persia rebellious; there (was) one, Arakha by name, an Armenian; he lied; thus he said; I am Nebuchadrezzar the son of Nabu-na'id; he made Babylon rebellious.

[4.3] Says Darius the king: These 9 kings I seized within these battles.

[4.4] Says Darius the king: These (are) the provinces which became rebellious; the Lie made them rebellious so that these deceived the people; afterwards Ahuramazda gave them into my hand; as was my will so [I did] unto them.

[4.5] Says Darius the king: O thou who shalt be king in the future, protect thyself strongly from Deceit; whatever man shall be a deceiver, him who deserves to be punished, punish, if thus thou shalt think "may my country be secure."

[4.6] Says Darius the king: This (is) what I did; by the grace of Ahuramazda I did (it) in every way; O thou who shalt examine this inscription in the future, let it convince thee (as to) what (was) done by me; regard it not as lies.

[4.7] Says Darius the king: I appeal to Ahuramazda that this (is) true (and) not false (which) I did in every way.

[4.8] Says Darius the king: By the grace of Ahuramazda much else (was) done by me that (is) not written on this inscription; for this reason it (is) not written lest whoever shall examine this inscription in the future, to him what has been done by me should seem too much; and it should not convince him but he should think (it) false.

[4.9] Says Darius the king: Who were the former kings, while they

lived, by these nothing (was) thus done as (was) done by me through the grace of Ahuramazda in every way.

[4.10] Says Darius the king: Now let it convince thee (as to) what (was) done by me; thus do not conceal this record; if thou shalt not conceal this record (but) tell (it) to the people, may Ahuramazda be a friend to thee and may there be unto thee a family abundantly and mayest thou live long.

[4.11] Says Darius the king: If thou shalt conceal this record (and) not tell (it) to the people, may Ahuramazda be a smiter unto thee and may there not be unto thee a family.

[4.12] Says Darius the king: This (is) what I did in every way; by the grace of Ahuramazda I did (it); Ahuramazda bore me aid and the other gods which are.

[4.13] Says Darius the king: For this reason Ahuramazda bore me aid and the other gods which are, because I was not an enemy, I was not a deceiver, I was not a wrong-doer, neither I nor my family; according to rectitude [I ruled] nor made I my power(?) an oppression to [those who praise me]; the man (who) helped my house, him who should be well esteemed, I esteemed; (the man) who would destroy it, him who should deserve punishment, I punished.

[4.14] Says Darius the king: O thou who shalt be king in the future, whatever man shall be a deceiver or a wrong-doer (be) not a friend to these; punish (them) with severe punishment.

[4.15] Says Darius the king: O thou who shalt see this inscription in the future which I have written or these sculptures, thou shalt not destroy (them) as long as thou shalt live; thus thou shalt guard them.

[4.16] Says Darius the king: If thou shalt see this inscription or these sculptures (and) shalt not destroy them and shalt guard them as long as thy family shall be, may Ahuramazda be a friend to thee and may there be unto thee a family abundantly and may thou live long and whatever thou shalt do, this for thee (let) Ahuramazda make [successful].

[4.17] Says Darius the king: If thou shalt see this inscription or these sculptures (and) shalt destroy; them and shalt not guard them as long as thy family shall be, may Ahuramazda be a smiter unto thee and may there not be unto thee a family and whatever thou shalt do, this let Ahuramazda destroy for thee.

[4.18] Says Darius the king: These (are) the men who were there then when I slew Gaumata the Magian, who called himself Bardiya; then these men cooperated as my allies; Intaphernes by name, the son of Vayaspara, a Persian; Otanes by name, the son of Thukhra, a Persian; Gobryas by name, the son of Mardonius, a Persian; Hydarnes by name, the son of Bagabigna, a Persian; Megabyzus by name, the son of Daduhya, a Persian; Ardumanish by name, the son of Vahauka, a Persian.

[4.19] Says Darius the king: O thou who shalt be king in the future, preserve. …

[4.20] Says Darius the king: By the grace of Ahuramazda this inscription which I made … I have written; this inscription; … me afterwards the inscription … within the provinces. … [By the favor of Ahuramazda this inscription in other ways I made. In addition, it was in Aryan, and has been made in leather. In addition, this inscription as a whole has been confirmed by the impression of a seal. And it was written, and the written document was read off to me. Afterwards this inscription was sent by me everywhere among the provinces; the people universally were pleased.]

[5.1] Says Darius the king: This (is) what I did … [when I became] king; (there is) a province Susiana [Elam] [by name]; this became estranged from me; [one man] … Mamita by name, a Susian [Elamite], him they made chief; afterwards I sent forth (my) army to Susiana; [one man] Gobryas by name, [a Persian] my subject, [him] I made chief [of them]; afterwards this Gobryas with an army went to Susiana; he engaged in [battle] with the Susians; afterwards Gobryas smote … and annihilated them(?) and seized [that … Mamita] their chief and brought him to me and I slew him; afterwards the province [became mine].

[5.2] Says Darius the king: Then the Susians [feared] and Ahuramazda gave them [into my hand]; I offered thanks; by the grace of Ahuramazda, as was my will, thus I did unto them.

[5.3] Says Darius the king: Whoever shall worship Ahuramazda, as long as [his family] shall be, and life. …

[5.4] Says Darius the king: With (my) army I went to Scythia; unto Scythia … the Tigris … unto the sea … I crossed in rafts(?); the Scythians I smote; one part I seized [and they were brought] bound to me and [I slew] them; … Sku(n)kha [Skunkha] by name, him I seized … there another I made chief … there was … by name; afterwards the

province became mine.

Source: Herbert Cushing Tolman, trans., *The Behistun Inscription of King Darius* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1908), http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/Persia/Behistun_txt.html.

12. INSCRIPTION OF DARIUS I AT NAQSH-E ROSTAM

Naqsh-e Rostam is an important historical site containing the tombs of the four Achaemenid kings Darius I (Darayavaush I) (r. 522–486 BCE), Xerxes I (Khshayarsha I) (r. 486–465 BCE), Artaxerxes I (Artakhshacha I) (r. 465–424 BCE), and Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE). The site is located approximately 39 miles (63 kilometers) north of the city of Shiraz in the southern Iranian province of Fars and 3.7 miles (6 kilometers) northwest of Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE). The resting tombs of the four Achaemenid kings were designed as cross-shaped tombs cut into the rock. A door in the center of the facade provided access to the interior of each royal tomb. The only tomb identified by an inscription is that of Darius I. In his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam, Darius I pays homage to the great god Ahura Mazda for creating Earth and the sky as well as happiness for man and bestowing kingship upon him. Darius also speaks of his Persian and Aryan lineage while at the same time listing the countries he ruled.

1. 1–8. A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.

2. 8–15. I am Darius a Great King, and King of Kings, King of countries containing all kinds of men, king in this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes [Vishtaspa], an Achaemenian, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage.

3. 15–30. Saith Darius the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda these are the countries which I seized outside of Persia; I ruled over them; they bore tribute to me; what was said to them by me, that they did; my law—that held them firm; Media, Elam, Parthia, Aria, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Sattagydia, Gandara, Sind, Amyrgian Scythians, Scythians with pointed caps, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Armenia, Cappadocia, Sardis, Ionia, Scythians who are across the sea, Skudra, Petasos-wearing Ionians, Libyans, Ethiopians, men of Maka, Carians.

4. 30–47. Saith Darius the King: Ahuramazda, when he saw this earth in commotion, thereafter bestowed it upon me, made me king; I am

king. By the favor of Ahuramazda I put it down in its place; what I said to them, that they did, as was my desire. If now thou shalt think that "How many are the countries which King Darius held?" look at the sculptures (of those) who bear the throne, then shalt thou know, shall it become known to thee: the spear of a Persian man has gone forth far; then shall it become known to thee: a Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.

5. 47–55. Saith Darius the King: This which has been done, all that by the will of Ahura Mazda I did. Ahuramazda bore me aid, until I did the work. Me may Ahuramazda protect from harm, and my royal house, and this land: this I pray of Ahuramazda, this may Ahuramazda give to me!

6. 56–60. O man, that which is the command of Ahuramazda, let this not seem repugnant to thee; do not leave the right path; do not rise in rebellion!

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 137–138. Reprinted with permission.

13. DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE PERSIAN ACHAEMENID EMPIRE FROM XENOPHON'S *OECONOMICUS* AND HERODOTUS'S *HISTORIES*

Our knowledge of the internal structure of the Persian Empire during the reign of Cyrus II the Great is scanty. After establishing his authority over a vast territory extending from the Jaxartes River (present-day Syr Darya) in Central Asia to the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea, Cyrus appointed governors to each newly conquered territory. For example, his son and crown prince Cambyses ruled Babylonia for a time as the representative of his father. The Persian Empire expanded during the reign of Cambyses II, who conquered Egypt. After the death of Cambyses, a group of Persian officers led by Darius seized the reins of power. After securing the throne and suppressing the rebellions that had erupted against his rule, Darius I expanded the number of provinces and reorganized their internal structure. Herodotus claimed that Darius divided his empire into 20 provinces. In his inscriptions at Bisotun in western Iran, Darius listed 23 provinces or regions in his empire. After his conquests in the east, the number of the provinces increased. Provinces were assessed to determine the amount of taxes each was expected to pay. Taxes were paid to the central government in the form of annual tribute. Each governor, or satrap, was responsible for collecting taxes and providing security and order in his province, or satrapy. As the representative of the king, the satrap enjoyed sufficient power to suppress any rebellion that undermined the authority of the

central government and disrupted the social and economic life of the communities under his rule. The two excerpts below from Xenophon's Oeconomicus *and from the* Histories *of Herodotus describe the role of the king in the administrative structure of the Achaemenid state and his relationship with his governors as well as the amount of tribute paid by each province.*

The King of Persians and His Governors from Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*

Crit. Then which are the arts you would counsel us to engage in?

Soc[rates]. Well, we shall not be ashamed, I hope, to imitate the kings of Persia? That monarch, it is said, regards amongst the noblest and most necessary pursuits two in particular, which are the arts of husbandry and war, and in these two he takes the strongest interest.

What! (Critobulus exclaimed); do you, Socrates, really believe that the king of Persia pays a personal regard to husbandry, along with all his other cares?

Soc. We have only to investigate the matter, Critobulus, and I daresay we shall discover whether this is so or not. We are agreed that he takes strong interest in military matters; since, however numerous the tributary nations, there is a governor to each, and every governor has orders from the king what number of cavalry, archers, slingers and targeteers it is his business to support, as adequate to control the subject population, or in case of hostile attack to defend the country. Apart from these the king keeps garrisons in all the citadels. The actual support of these devolves upon the governor, to whom the duty is assigned. The king himself meanwhile conducts the annual inspection and review of troops, both mercenary and other, that have orders to be under arms. These all are simultaneously assembled (with the exception of the garrisons of citadels) at the mustering ground, so named. That portion of the army within access of the royal residence the king reviews in person; the remainder, living in remoter districts of the empire, he inspects by proxy, sending certain trusty representatives. Wherever the commandants of garrisons, the captains of thousands, and the satraps are seen to have their appointed members complete, and at the same time shall present their troops equipped with horse and arms in thorough efficiency, these officers the king delights to honour, and showers gifts upon them largely. But as to those officers whom he finds either to have neglected their garrisons, or to have made private gain of their position, these he heavily chastises, deposing them from office, and appointing other superintendents in their stead. Such conduct, I think we may say, indisputably proves the interest which he takes in matters military.

Further than this, by means of a royal progress through the

country, he has an opportunity of inspecting personally some portion of his territory, and again of visiting the remainder in proxy as above by trusty representatives; and wheresoever he perceives that any of his governors can present to him a district thickly populated, and the soil in a state of active cultivation, full of trees and fruits, its natural products, to such officers he adds other territory, adorning them with gifts and distinguishing them by seats of honour. But those officers whose land he sees lying idle and with but few inhabitants, owing either to the harshness of their government, their insolence, or their neglect, he punishes, and making them to cease from their office he appoints other rulers in their place. … Does not this conduct indicate at least as great an anxiety to promote the active cultivation of the land by its inhabitants as to provide for its defense by military occupation?

Moreover, the governors appointed to preside over these two departments of state are not one and the same. But one class governs the inhabitants proper including the workers of the soil, and collects the tribute from them, another is in command of the armed garrisons. If the commandant protects the country insufficiently, the civil governor of the population, who is in charge also of the productive works, lodges accusation against the commandant to the effect that the inhabitants are prevented working through deficiency of protection. Or if again, in spite of peace being secured to the works of the land by the military governor, the civil authority still presents a territory sparse in population and untilled, it is the commandant's turn to accuse the civil ruler. For you may take it as a rule, a population tilling their territory badly will fail to support their garrisons and be quite unequal to paying their tribute. Where a satrap is appointed he has charge of both departments.

Source: Xenophon, "The Economist," in *The Works of Xenophon,* Vol. 3, Part 1, translated by H. G. Dakyns (New York: Macmillan, 1897), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1173/1173-h/1173-h.htm.

Governors and Taxes in the *Histories* of Herodotus

89. … He [Darius I] established twenty provinces, which the Persians themselves call *satrapies;* and having established the provinces and set over them rulers, he appointed tribute to come to him from them according to races, joining also to the chief races those who dwelt on their borders, or passing beyond the immediate neighbours and assigning to various races those which lay more distant. He divided the provinces and the yearly payment of tribute as follows: and those of them who brought in silver were commanded to pay by the standard of the Babylonian talent, but those who brought in gold by

the Euboïc talent; now the Babylonian talent is equal to eight-and-seventy Euboïc pounds. For in the reign of Cyrus, and again of Cambyses, nothing was fixed about tribute, but they used to bring gifts: and on account of this appointing of tribute and other things like this, the Persians say that Darius was a shopkeeper, Cambyses a master, and Cyrus a father; the one because he dealt with all his affairs like a shopkeeper, the second because he was harsh and had little regard for any one, and the other because he was gentle and contrived for them all things good.

90. From the Ionians and the Magnesians who dwell in Asia and the Aiolians, Carians, Lykians, Milyans and Pamphylians (for one single sum was appointed by him as tribute for all these) there came in four hundred talents of silver. This was appointed by him to be the first division. From the Mysians and Lydians and Lasonians and Cabalians and Hytennians there came in five hundred talents: this is the second division. From the Hellespontians who dwell on the right as one sails in and the Phrygians and the Thracians who dwell in Asia and the Paphlagonians and Mariandynoi and Syrians the tribute was three hundred and sixty talents: this is the third division. From the Kilikians, besides three hundred and sixty white horses, one for every day in the year, there came also five hundred talents of silver; of these one hundred and forty talents were spent upon the horsemen which served as a guard to the Kilikian land, and the remaining three hundred and sixty came in year by year to Darius: this is the fourth division.

91. From that division which begins with the city of Posideion, founded by Amphilochos the son of Amphiaraos on the borders of the Kilikians and the Syrians, and extends as far as Egypt, not including the territory of the Arabians (for this was free from payment), the amount was three hundred and fifty talents; and in this division are the whole of Phenicia and Syria which is called Palestine and Cyprus: this is the fifth division. From Egypt and the Libyans bordering upon Egypt, and from Kyrene and Barca, for these were so ordered as to belong to the Egyptian division, there came in seven hundred talents, without reckoning the money produced by the lake of Moiris, that is to say from the fish; without reckoning this, I say, or the corn which was contributed in addition by measure, there came in seven hundred talents; for as regards the corn, they contribute by measure one hundred and twenty thousand bushels for the use of those Persians who are established in the “White Fortress” at Memphis, and for their foreign mercenaries: this is the sixth division. The Sattagydai and Gandarians and Dadicans and Aparytai, being joined together, brought in one hundred and seventy talents: this is the seventh division. From Susa and the rest of the land of the Kissians there came in three

hundred: this is the eighth division.

92. From Babylon and from the rest of Assyria there came in to him a thousand talents of silver and five hundred boys for eunuchs: this is the ninth division. From Agbatana and from the rest of Media and the Paricanians and Orthocorybantians, four hundred and fifty talents: this is the tenth division. The Caspians and Pausicans and Pantimathoi and Dareitai, contributing together, brought in two hundred talents: this is the eleventh division. From the Bactrians as far as the Aigloi the tribute was three hundred and sixty talents: this is the twelfth division.

93. From Pactyïke and the Armenians and the people bordering upon them as far as the Euxine, four hundred talents: this is the thirteenth division. From the Sagartians and Sarangians and Thamanaians and Utians and Mycans and those who dwell in the islands of the Erythraian Sea, where the king settles those who are called the "Removed," from all these together a tribute was produced of six hundred talents: this is the fourteenth division. The Sacans and the Caspians brought in two hundred and fifty talents: this is the fifteenth division. The Parthians and Chorasmians and Sogdians and Areians three hundred talents: this is the sixteenth division.

94. The Paricanians and Ethiopians in Asia brought in four hundred talents: this is the seventeenth division. To the Matienians and Saspeirians and Alarodians was appointed a tribute of two hundred talents: this is the eighteenth division. To the Moschoi and Tibarenians and Macronians and Mossynoicoi and Mares three hundred talents were ordered: this is the nineteenth division. Of the Indians the number is far greater than that of any other race of men of whom we know; and they brought in a tribute larger than all the rest, that is to say three hundred and sixty talents of gold-dust: this is the twentieth division.

95. Now if we compare Babylonian with Euboïc talents, the silver is found to amount to nine thousand eight hundred and eighty talents; and if we reckon the gold at thirteen times the value of silver, weight for weight, the gold-dust is found to amount to four thousand six hundred and eighty Euboïc talents. These being all added together, the total which was collected as yearly tribute for Darius amounts to fourteen thousand five hundred and sixty Euboïc talents: the sums which are less than these I pass over and do not mention.

96. This was the tribute which came in to Darius from Asia and from a small part of Libya: but as time went on, other tribute came in also

from the islands and from those who dwell in Europe as far as Thessaly. This tribute the king stores up in his treasury in the following manner:—he melts it down and pours it into jars of earthenware, and when he has filled the jars he takes off the earthenware jar from the metal; and when he wants money he cuts off so much as he needs on each occasion.

97. These were the provinces and the assessments of tribute: and the Persian land alone has not been mentioned by me as paying a contribution, for the Persians have their land to dwell in free from payment. The following moreover had no tribute fixed for them to pay, but brought gifts, namely the Ethiopians who border upon Egypt, whom Cambyses subdued as he marched against the Long-lived Ethiopians, those who dwell about Nysa, which is called "sacred," and who celebrate the festivals in honour of Dionysos: these Ethiopians and those who dwell near them have the same kind of seed as the Callantian Indians, and they have underground dwellings. These both together brought every other year, and continue to bring even to my own time, two quart measures of unmelted gold and two hundred blocks of ebony and five Ethiopian boys and twenty large elephant tusks. The Colchians also had set themselves among those who brought gifts, and with them those who border upon them extending as far as the range of the Caucasus (for the Persian rule extends as far as these mountains, but those who dwell in the parts beyond Caucasus toward the North Wind regard the Persians no longer),—these, I say, continued to bring the gifts which they had fixed for themselves every four years even down to my own time, that is to say, a hundred boys and a hundred maidens. Finally, the Arabians brought a thousand talents of frankincense every year. Such were the gifts which these brought to the king apart from the tribute.

Source: Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus,* Vol. 1, Book 3.89–98, translated by G. C. Macaulay (New York: Macmillan, 1890).

14. PERSIAN ENGINEERING: DESCRIPTION OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROYAL ROAD FROM HERODOTUS'S *HISTORIES* AND OF THE SUEZ CANAL FROM AN INSCRIPTION OF DARIUS I

Recognizing the importance of communication in ruling and controlling a vast empire and to facilitate timely and unhindered communication between the provinces and the Persian capitals of Susa and Ecbatana, the Achaemenid monarch Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) established the Royal Road, a major highway of 1,500 miles connecting the Achaemenid winter capital at the city of Susa in southwestern Iran to Sardis in western Asia

Minor (modern-day Turkey), thus creating for the first time a direct link between the economies of Central and Southwest Asia and those of Greece and Southeastern Europe. Rest stations as well as excellent caravanserais were built along the length of the road. Messengers used the Royal Road to convey news and information from various provinces of the empire to the capital. The road also facilitated the movement of Persian armies while at the same time promoting trade and commerce in the empire. One of the strategic objectives of the Achaemenid state was to convert the newly created empire into an integrated free trade zone. Darius I completed the process of linking the empire by building the first Suez Canal. Thousands of workers from the four corners of the empire were assembled to construct this 125-mile (200-kilometer) channel connecting the Gulf of Suez to an arm of the Nile River. Thus, the whole empire from India to the Aegean was linked by sea as well as by land. The first excerpt below is an account of the Royal Road from Herodotus.

During his long reign, Darius I reestablished Persian rule over Egypt, which had been conquered by Cambyses II in 524 BCE. In 517 BCE Darius traveled to Egypt, where he won the support of the country's priests by restoring their privileges. The Persians then used Egypt as their territorial base to push westward and capture Libya. From Egypt, Darius shifted his focus to India. According to Herodotus, before invading Egypt Darius had organized a naval mission, which traveled through the Indus River to the Indian Ocean and thence northward to the Red Sea, reaching Egypt near the present-day Suez 30 months later. Darius was apparently fascinated by the idea of connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea through a canal. Thus, he ordered the construction of a canal, which would be the forerunner of the modern-day Suez Canal built in the second half of the 19th century and completed in 1869. The second excerpt below is a short inscription in which Darius I celebrated the completion of the first Suez Canal in Egypt.

The Royal Road in Herodotus

Book 5

52. As regards this road the truth is as follows.—Everywhere there are royal stages and excellent resting-places, and the whole road runs through country which is inhabited and safe. Through Lydia and Phrygia there extend twenty stages, amounting to ninety-four and a half leagues; and after Phrygia succeeds the river Halys, at which there is a gate which one must needs pass through in order to cross the river, and a strong guard-post is established there. Then after crossing over into Cappadokia [Cappadocia] it is twenty-eight stages, being a hundred and four leagues, by this way to the borders of

Kilikia; and on the borders of the Kilikians you will pass through two several gates and go by two several guard-posts: then after passing through these it is three stages, amounting to fifteen and a half leagues, to journey through Kilikia; and the boundary of Kilikia and Armenia is a navigable river called Euphrates. In Armenia the number of stages with resting-places is fifteen, and of leagues fifty-six and a half, and there is a guard-post on the way: then from Armenia, when one enters the land of Matiene, there are thirty-four stages, amounting to a hundred and thirty-seven leagues. … The number of these stages amounts in all to one hundred and eleven.

53. This is the number of stages with resting-places, as one goes up from Sardis to Susa: and if the royal road has been rightly measured as regards leagues, and if the league is equal to thirty furlongs, (as undoubtedly it is), the number of furlongs from Sardis to that which is called the palace of Memnon is thirteen thousand five hundred, the number of leagues being four hundred and fifty [1,550 miles]. So if one travels a hundred and fifty furlongs each day, just ninety days are spent on the journey.

Book 8

98. … Now there is nothing mortal which accomplishes a journey with more speed than these messengers, so skilfully has this been invented by the Persians: for they say that according to the number of days of which the entire journey consists, so many horses and men are set at intervals, each man and horse appointed for a day's journey. These neither snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness of night prevents from accomplishing each one the task proposed to him, with the very utmost speed. The first then rides and delivers the message with which he is charged to the second, and the second to the third; and after that it goes through them handed from one to the other. …

Source: Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus,* Vol. 2, Books 5.52–53 and 8.98, translated by G. C. Macaulay (New York: Macmillan, 1890).

The First Suez Canal: An Inscription of Darius I at Suez

Saith Darius the King: I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt; I gave order to dig this canal from a river by name Nile, which flows in Egypt, to the sea, which goes from Persia. Afterward this canal was dug thus as I had ordered, and ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia thus as was my desire.

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 147. Reprinted with permission.

15. INSCRIPTION OF DARIUS I AT SUSA

Susa served as one of the capitals of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty (r. 550–330 BCE). The other capitals of the empire were Hagmatana (Greek: Ecbatana) and Persepolis. In Susa the Achaemenid kings built impressive palaces and monuments. The inscriptions excavated in Susa include one from Darius I, which provides a list of the raw materials used in constructing the Persian royal palaces and identifies the country that supplied each of them. The inscription highlights the important role played by the eastern provinces of the Persian Empire, particularly Sogdiana (Old Persian: Suguda), Bactria (Old Persian: Bakhtrish), and Chorasmia (Old Persian: Uvarazmiy). Sogdiana was the region lying north of the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and south of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes River) corresponding with present-day Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan, while Bactria was located south of the Oxus River in present-day northern Afghanistan. Ancient Chorasmia lay along the lower reaches of the Oxus River, south of the Aral Sea in present-day northwestern Uzbekistan and northern Turkmenistan.

Saith Darius the King: Ahuramazda, the greatest of the gods—he created me; he made me king; he bestowed upon me this kingdom, great, possessed of good horses, possessed of good men. …

By the favor of Ahuramazda my father Hystaspes and Arsames my grandfather—these both were living when Ahuramazda made me king in this earth. …

The gold was brought from Sardis [western Asia Minor, present-day Turkey] and from Bactria, which here was wrought. The precious stone lapis-lazuli and carnelian which was wrought here, this was brought from Sogdiana. The precious stone turquoise, this was brought from Chorasmia, which was wrought here.

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 142–144. Reprinted with permission.

16. INSCRIPTIONS OF XERXES AT PERSEPOLIS

After the death of the Achaemenid monarch Darius I in 486 BCE, his son Xerxes succeeded him on the throne. Xerxes ruled from 486 to 465 BCE. Before the death of Darius, Xerxes had served as the viceroy of Babylon. The first challenge confronting Xerxes was a rebellion in Egypt, which he suppressed quickly. Another rebellion erupted in Babylon, which was also put down by the Persian king. In the sixth year of his reign, Xerxes led his forces against Greece. After crossing the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, a Persian army seized Thessaly, Macedonia, and northern Greece. Athens was divided between those who advocated negotiations with the Persian

king and those who favored a confrontation. The prowar party triumphed and formed a league under the leadership of Sparta, which tried to halt the Persian advance at a mountain pass called Thermopylae. The Persians defeated the small Spartan force and advanced on Athens, which was seized with little resistance. The confrontation between the Persian army and a small band of Athenian fighters resulted in the burning and destruction of temples and homes on the Acropolis by the Persians. The next confrontation between the Persians and the Greeks took place at Salamis, where the Greek fleet destroyed the Persian naval forces. After this defeat, Xerxes did not remain in Greece. He returned to Asia and left an army under the command of one of his generals, Mardonius, in Greece. In 479 BCE, a year after Xerxes had departed mainland Greece, the Persians were back on the offensive, attacking Attica, which included Athens. The Greeks finally managed to organize an army, which fought the Persians on the Plain of Plataea. Mardonius made the fatal mistake of participating in the fighting. The Persian commander was killed on the battlefield, and his army was forced to accept defeat and withdraw. The Greeks scored another impressive victory against a Persian force under the command of Tigranes near Mount Mycale on the coast of Asia Minor. Xerxes spent the remainder of his reign on building projects, particularly at the palace complex of Persepolis in southern Iran. In the three short inscriptions from Persepolis in southern Iran, Xerxes spoke of his royal lineage, the countries he ruled, and the building projects he had initiated.

Text of the First Inscription of Xerxes in Persepolis

Saith Xerxes the Great King: What has been built by me here, and what has been built by me at a distance (from here), all that by the favor of Ahuramazda I built. Me may Ahuramazda together with the gods protect, and my kingdom, and what has been built by me.

Saith Xerxes the Great King: By the favor of Ahuramazda this palace Darius the King built, who was my father. Me may Ahuramazda together with the gods protect me, and what was built by me, and what was built by my father Darius the King, that also may Ahuramazda together with the gods protect.

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 148–149. Reprinted with permission.

Text of the Second Inscription of Xerxes in Persepolis

Saith Xerxes the King: My father was Darius; Darius's father was Hystaspes [Vishtaspa] by name; Hystaspes's father was Arsames [Arshama] by name. Both Hystaspes and Arsames were both living, at that time—thus unto Ahuramazda was the desire—Darius, who was

my father, him he made king in this earth. When Darius became king, he built much excellent (construction).

Saith Xerxes the King: Other sons of Darius there were, (but)—thus unto Ahuramazda was the desire—Darius my father made me the greatest after himself. When my father Darius went away from the throne, by the will of Ahuramazda I became king on my father's throne. When I became king, I built much excellent (construction). What had been built by my father, that I protected, and other building I added. What moreover I built, and what my father built, all that by the favor of Ahuramazda we built.

Saith Xerxes the Great King: By the favor of Ahuramazda, King Darius my father built and ordered (to be built) much good (construction). By the favor also of Ahuramazda I added to that construction and built further (buildings).

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 149–150. Reprinted with permission.

Text of the Third Inscription of Xerxes in Persepolis

Saith Xerxes the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda these are the countries of which I was king … ; Media, Elam, Arachosia, Armenia, Drangiana, Parthia, Aria, Bactria, Sogdians, Chorasmia, Babylonia, Assyria, Sattagydia, Sardis, Egypt, Ionians, those who dwell by the sea and those who dwell across the sea, men of Maka, Arabia, Gandara, Sind, Cappadocia, Dahae, Amyrgian Scythians, Pointed-Cap Scythians, Skudra, men of Akaufaka, Libyans, Carians, Ethiopians.

Saith Xerxes the King: When that I became king, there is among these countries which are inscribed above (one which) was in commotion. Afterwards Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the favor of Ahuramazda I smote that country and put it down in its place.

And among these countries there was (a place) where previously false gods were worshipped. Afterwards, by the favor of Ahuramazda, I destroyed that sanctuary of the demons, and I made proclamation, "The demons shall not be worshipped!" Where previously the demons were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahuramazda and Arta reverently. …

Thou who (shalt be) hereafter, if thou shalt think, "Happy may I be when living, and when dead may I be blessed," have respect for that law which Ahuramazda has established; worship Ahuramazda and Arta reverently. The man who has respect for that law, which Ahuramazda has established, and worships Ahuramazda and Arta reverently, he both becomes happy while living, and becomes blessed when dead.

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 150–152. Reprinted with permission.

17. RELIGION OF THE ACHAEMENID KINGS FROM AN INSCRIPTION OF ARTAXERXES II

In his inscriptions in western and southern Iran, the Persian Achaemenid king Darius I (Darayavaush I) praised the great god Ahura Mazda, who had created Earth and the sky and had made Darius the king of many countries. In one of his inscriptions at Persepolis in southern Iran, Darius's successor, the Persian Achaemenid king Xerxes (Khshayarsha), referred to Ahura Mazda as the supreme god but also mentioned "other gods." No other gods were mentioned in the inscriptions of his father, Darius I. Another Achaemenid monarch, Artaxerxes II (Artakhshacha II), who ruled from 404 to 359 BCE, mentioned two other ancient Iranian gods, Anahita, the goddess of waters, and Mithra, the god of covenants and the sun. The mention of "other gods" in the inscription of Xerxes and the appearance of the two gods Anahita and Mithra in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II has propelled a debate among scholars about the actual religion of Achaemenid kings. Were they followers of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster), or did they follow a religion that shared the same god with Zoroastrianism (i.e., Ahura Mazda) but was not necessarily the same exact creed preached by Zarathustra? And were the Achaemenids followers of a monotheistic religion, which worshipped Ahura Mazda as the only god, or were they adherents of a polytheistic faith that allowed the worship of many gods and goddesses? The inscription of Artaxerxes II below clearly demonstrates that the Persian king worshipped not only Ahura Mazda but also other Iranian gods. One of the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II identifies these other gods as Anaitis and Mithras.

Saith Artaxerxes the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries, King in this earth, son of Darius the King, of Darius (who was) son of Artaxerxes the King, of Artaxerxes (who was) son of Xerxes the King, of Xerxes (who was) son of Darius the King, of Darius (who was) son of Darius the King, of Darius (who was) son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian: This palace Darius my great-great-grandfather built; under Artaxerxes my grandfather it was burned; by the favor of Ahuramazda, Anaitis [Anahita], and Mithras [Mithra], this palace I built. May Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras protect me from all evil, and that which I have built may they not shatter nor harm.

Saith Artaxerxes the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda this is the palace, which I built in my lifetime as a pleasant retreat. May Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras protect me from all evil, and my building.

Source: Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 154. Reprinted with permission.

18. PLUTARCH'S ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF CUNAXA BETWEEN ARTAXERXES II AND CYRUS THE YOUNGER

The Persian Achaemenid king Darius II had two sons: Artaxerxes (Artakhshacha) and Cyrus (Kurush). The older son, Artaxerxes, ascended the Persian throne upon the death of Darius II in 404 BCE. Artaxerxes II was opposed by his younger brother Cyrus (i.e., Cyrus the Younger), who viewed himself as more deserving of kingship than his older brother. Before the two brothers could clash over the throne, their mother interceded with Artaxerxes and secured for Cyrus the governorship of Asia Minor.

Shortly after Artaxerxes II became king, Egypt broke away from the Achaemenid Empire and declared its independence. Persian authority would not be reestablished in Egypt until the reign of Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BCE). A year after Artaxerxes II had lost Egypt, his younger brother Cyrus revolted against him. Cyrus raised an army, which included a large unit of Greek mercenaries, and marched against his brother. When the two armies clashed in 401 BCE in the Battle of Cunaxa on the left bank of the Euphrates River north of Babylon in present-day Iraq, Cyrus the Younger was defeated and killed. The Greek biographer Plutarch described the confrontation between the two brothers in his short biography of Artaxerxes II, an excerpt of which appears below.

The first Artaxerxes, among all the kings of Persia the most remarkable for a gentle and noble spirit, was surnamed the Long-handed, his right hand being longer than his left, and was the son of Xerxes. The second, whose story I am now writing, who had the surname of the Mindful, was the grandson of the former, by his daughter Parysatis, who brought Darius four sons, the eldest Artaxerxes, the next Cyrus, and two younger than these, Ostanes and Oxathres. Cyrus took his name of the ancient Cyrus, as he, they say, had his from the sun, which, in the Persian language, is called Cyrus. Artaxerxes was at first called Arsicas; Dinon says Oarses; but it is utterly improbable that Ctesias (however otherwise he may have filled his books with a perfect farrago of incredible and senseless fables) should be ignorant of the name of the king with whom he lived as his physician, attending upon himself, his wife, his mother, and his children.

Cyrus, from his earliest youth, showed something of a headstrong and vehement character; Artaxerxes, on the other side, was gentler in everything, and of a nature more yielding and soft in its action. He married a beautiful and virtuous wife, at the desire of his parents, but kept her as expressly against their wishes. For king Darius, having put

her brother to death, was purposing likewise to destroy her. But Arsicas, throwing himself at his mother's feet, by many tears, at last, with much ado, persuaded her that they should neither put her to death nor divorce her from him. However, Cyrus was his mother's favorite, and the son whom she most desired to settle in the throne. And therefore, his father Darius now lying ill, he, being sent for from the sea to the court, set out thence with full hopes that by her means he was to be declared the successor to the kingdom. For Parysatis had the specious plea in his behalf, which Xerxes on the advice of Demaratus had of old made use of, that she had borne him Arsicas when he was a subject, but Cyrus when a king. Notwithstanding, she prevailed not with Darius, but the eldest son Arsicas was proclaimed king, his name being changed into Artaxerxes; and Cyrus remained satrap of Lydia, and commander in the maritime provinces.

It was not long after the decease of Darius that the king, his successor, went to Pasargadae, to have the ceremony of his inauguration consummated by the Persian priests. There is a temple dedicated to a warlike goddess, whom one might liken to Minerva; into which when the royal person to be initiated has passed, he must strip himself of his own robe, and put on that which Cyrus the first wore before he was king; then, having devoured a frail of figs, he must eat turpentine, and drink a cup of sour milk. To which if they superadd any other rites, it is unknown to any but those that are present at them. Now Artaxerxes being about to address himself to this solemnity, Tisaphernes came to him, bringing a certain priest, who, having trained up Cyrus in his youth in the established discipline of Persia, and having taught him the Magian philosophy, was likely to be as much disappointed as any man that his pupil did not succeed to the throne. And for that reason his veracity was the less questioned when he charged Cyrus as though he had been about to lie in wait for the king in the temple, and to assault and assassinate him as he was putting off his garment. Some affirm that he was apprehended upon this impeachment, others that he had entered the temple and was pointed out there, as he lay lurking, by the priest. But as he was on the point of being put to death, his mother clasped him in her arms, and, entwining him with the tresses of her hair, joined his neck close to her own, and by her bitter lamentation and intercession to Artaxerxes for him, succeeded in saving his life; and sent him away again to the sea and to his former province. This, however, could no longer content him; nor did he so well remember his delivery as his arrest, his resentment for which made him more eagerly desirous of the kingdom than before.

Some say that he revolted from his brother, because he had not a revenue allowed him sufficient for his daily meals; but this is on the

face of it absurd. For had he had nothing else, yet he had a mother ready to supply him with whatever he could desire out of her own means. But the great number of soldiers who were hired from all quarters and maintained, as Xenophon informs us, for his service, by his friends and connections, is in itself a sufficient proof of his riches. He did not assemble them together in a body, desiring as yet to conceal his enterprise; but he had agents everywhere, enlisting foreign soldiers upon various pretenses; and, in the meantime, Parysatis, who was with the king, did her best to put aside all suspicions, and Cyrus himself always wrote in a humble and dutiful manner to him, sometimes soliciting favor, sometimes making countercharges against Tisaphernes, as if his jealousy and contest had been wholly with him. Moreover, there was a certain natural dilatoriness in the king, which was taken by many for clemency. And, indeed, in the beginning of his reign, he did seem really to emulate the gentleness of the first Artaxerxes, being very accessible in his person, and liberal to a fault in the distribution of honors and favors. Even in his punishments, no contumely or vindictive pleasure could be seen; and those who offered him presents were as much pleased with his manner of accepting, as were those who received gifts from him with his graciousness and amiability in giving them. Nor truly was there anything, however inconsiderable, given him, which he did not deign kindly to accept of; insomuch that when one Omises had presented him with a very large pomegranate, “By Mithras,” said he, “this man, were he entrusted with it, would turn a small city into a great one.”

Once when some were offering him one thing, some another, as he was on a progress, a certain poor laborer, having got nothing at hand to bring him, ran to the river side, and, taking up water in his hands, offered it to him; with which Artaxerxes was so well pleased that he sent him a goblet of gold and a thousand darics. To Euclidas, the Lacedaemonian, who had made a number of bold and arrogant speeches to him, he sent word by one of his officers, “You have leave to say what you please to me, and I, you should remember, may both say and do what I please to you.” Teribazus once, when they were hunting, came up and pointed out to the king that his royal robe was torn; the king asked him what he wished him to do; and when Teribazus replied “May it please you to put on another and give me that,” the king did so, saying withal, “I give it you, Teribazus, but I charge you not to wear it.” He, little regarding the injunction, being not a bad, but a light-headed, thoughtless man, immediately the king took it off, put it on, and bedecked himself further with royal golden necklaces and women’s ornaments, to the great scandal of everybody, the thing being quite unlawful. But the king laughed and told him, “You have my leave to wear the trinkets as a woman, and the robe of

state as a fool." And whereas none usually sat down to eat with the king besides his mother and his wedded wife, the former being placed above, the other below him, Artaxerxes invited also to his table his two younger brothers, Ostanes and Oxathres. But what was the most popular thing of all among the Persians was the sight of his wife Statira's chariot, which always appeared with its curtains down, allowing her countrywomen to salute and approach her, which made the queen a great favorite with the people.

Yet busy, factious men, that delighted in change, professed it to be their opinion that the times needed Cyrus, a man of a great spirit, an excellent warrior, and a lover of his friends, and that the largeness of their empire absolutely required a bold and enterprising prince. Cyrus, then; not only relying upon those of his own province near the sea, but upon many of those in the upper countries near the king, commenced the war against him. He wrote to the Lacedaemonians, bidding them come to his assistance and supply him with men, assuring them that to those who came to him on foot he would give horses, and to the horsemen chariots; that upon those who had farms he would bestow villages, and those who were lords of villages he would make so of cities; and that those who would be his soldiers should receive their pay, not by count, but by weight. And among many other high praises of himself, he said he had the stronger soul; was more a philosopher and a better Magian; and could drink and bear more wine than his brother, who, as he averred, was such a coward and so little like a man, that he could neither sit his horse in hunting nor his throne in time of danger. The Lacedaemonians, his letter being read, sent a staff to Clearchus, commanding him to obey Cyrus in all things. So Cyrus marched towards the king, having under his conduct a numerous host of barbarians, and but little less than thirteen thousand stipendiary Grecians; alleging first one cause, then another, for his expedition. Yet the true reason lay not long concealed, but Tisaphernes went to the king in person to declare it. Thereupon, the court was all in an uproar and tumult, the queen-mother bearing almost the whole blame of the enterprise, and her retainers being suspected and accused. Above all, Statira angered her by bewailing the war and passionately demanding where were now the pledges and the intercessions which saved the life of him that conspired against his brother; "to the end," she said, "that he might plunge us all into war and trouble." For which words Parysatis hating Statira, and being naturally implacable and savage in her anger and revenge, consulted how she might destroy her. But since Dinon tells us that her purpose took effect in the time of the war, and Ctesias says it was after it, I shall keep the story for the place to which the latter assigns it, as it is very unlikely that he, who was actually present, should not know the

time when it happened, and there was no motive to induce him designedly to misplace its date in his narrative of it, though it is not infrequent with him in his history to make excursions from truth into mere fiction and romance.

As Cyrus was upon the march, rumors and reports were brought him, as though the king still deliberated, and were not minded to fight and presently to join battle with him; but to wait in the heart of his kingdom until his forces should have come in thither from all parts of his dominions. He had cut a trench through the plain ten fathoms in breadth, and as many in depth, the length of it being no less than four hundred furlongs. Yet he allowed Cyrus to pass across it, and to advance almost to the city of Babylon. Then Teribazus, as the report goes, was the first that had the boldness to tell the king that he ought not to avoid the conflict, nor to abandon Media, Babylon, and even Susa, and hide himself in Persis, when all the while he had an army many times over more numerous than his enemies, and an infinite company of governors and captains that were better soldiers and politicians than Cyrus. So at last he resolved to fight, as soon as it was possible for him. Making, therefore, his first appearance, all on a sudden, at the head of nine hundred thousand well-marshaled men, he so startled and surprised the enemy, who with the confidence of contempt were marching on their way in no order, and with their arms not ready for use, that Cyrus, in the midst of much noise and tumult, was scarce able to form them for battle. Moreover, the very manner in which he led on his men, silently and slowly, made the Grecians stand amazed at his good discipline; who had expected irregular shouting and leaping, much confusion and separation between one body of men and another, in so vast a multitude of troops. He also placed the choicest of his armed chariots in the front of his own phalanx over against the Grecian troops, that a violent charge with these might cut open their ranks before they closed with them.

But as this battle is described by many historians, and Xenophon in particular as good as shows it us by eyesight, not as a past event, but as a present action, and by his vivid account makes his hearers feel all the passions and join in all the dangers of it, it would be folly in me to give any larger account of it than barely to mention any things omitted by him which yet deserve to be recorded. The place, then, in which the two armies were drawn out is called Cunaxa, being about five hundred furlongs distant from Babylon. And here Clearchus beseeching Cyrus before the fight to retire behind the combatants, and not expose himself to hazard, they say he replied, “What is this, Clearchus? Would you have me, who aspire to empire, show myself unworthy of it?” But if Cyrus committed a great fault in entering

headlong into the midst of danger, and not paying any regard to his own safety, Clearchus was as much to blame, if not more, in refusing to lead the Greeks against the main body of the enemy, where the king stood, and in keeping his right wing close to the river, for fear of being surrounded. For if he wanted, above all other things, to be safe, and considered it his first object to sleep in whole skin, it had been his best way not to have stirred from home. But, after marching in arms ten thousand furlongs from the sea-coast, simply on his own choosing, for the purpose of placing Cyrus on the throne, to look about and select a position which would enable him, not to preserve him under whose pay and conduct he was, but himself to engage with more ease and security seemed much like one that through fear of present dangers had abandoned the purpose of his actions, and been false to the design of his expedition. For it is evident from the very event of the battle that none of those who were in array around the king's person could have stood the shock of the Grecian charge; and had they been beaten out of the field, and Artaxerxes either fled or fallen, Cyrus would have gained by the victory, not only safety, but a crown. And, therefore, Clearchus, by his caution, must be considered more to blame for the result in the destruction of the life and fortune of Cyrus, than he by his heat and rashness. For had the king made it his business to discover a place, where having posted the Grecians, he might encounter them with the least hazard, he would never have found out any other but that which was most remote from himself and those near him; of his defeat in which he was insensible, and, though Clearchus had the victory, yet Cyrus could not know of it, and could take no advantage of it before his fall. Cyrus knew well enough what was expedient to be done, and commanded Clearchus with his men to take their place in the center. Clearchus replied that he would take care to have all arranged as was best, and then spoiled all.

For the Grecians, where they were, defeated the barbarians till they were weary, and chased them successfully a very great way. But Cyrus being mounted upon a noble but a headstrong and hard-mouthed horse, bearing the name, as Ctesias tells us, of Pasacas, Artagerses, the leader of the Cadusians, galloped up to him, crying aloud, "O most unjust and senseless of men, who are the disgrace of the honored name of Cyrus, are you come here leading the wicked Greeks on a wicked journey, to plunder the good things of the Persians, and this with the intent of slaying your lord and brother, the master of ten thousand times ten thousand servants that are better men than you? as you shall see this instant; for you shall lose your head here, before you look upon the face of the king." Which when he had said, he cast his javelin at him. But the coat of mail stoutly repelled it, and Cyrus was not wounded; yet the stroke falling heavy

upon him, he reeled under it. Then Artagerses turning his horse, Cyrus threw his weapon, and sent the head of it through his neck near the shoulder bone. So that it is almost universally agreed to by all the author that Artagerses was slain by him. But as to the death of Cyrus, since Xenophon, as being himself no eye-witness of it, has stated it simply and in few words, it may not be amiss perhaps to run over on the one hand what Dinon, and on the other, what Ctesias has said of it.

Dinon then affirms, that, after the death of Artagerses, Cyrus, furiously attacking the guard of Artaxerxes, wounded the king's horse, and so dismounted him, and when Teribazus had quickly lifted him up upon another, and said to him, "O king, remember this day, which is not one to be forgotten," Cyrus, again spurring up his horse, struck down Artaxerxes. But at the third assault the king being enraged, and saying to those near him that death was more eligible, made up to Cyrus, who furiously and blindly rushed in the face of the weapons opposed to him. So the king struck him with a javelin, as likewise did those that were about him. And thus Cyrus falls, as some say, by the hand of the king; as others, by the dart of a Carian, to whom Artaxerxes, for a reward of his achievement, gave the privilege of carrying ever after a golden cock upon his spear before the first ranks of the army in all expeditions. For the Persians call the men of Caria cocks, because of the crests with which they adorn their helmets.

But the account of Ctesias, to put it shortly, omitting many details, is as follows: Cyrus, after the death of Artagerses, rode up against the king, as he did against him, neither exchanging a word with the other. But Ariaeus, Cyrus's friend, was beforehand with him, and darted first at the king, yet wounded him not. Then the king cast his lance at his brother, but missed him, though he both hit and slew Satiphernes, a noble man and a faithful friend to Cyrus. Then Cyrus directed his lance against the king, and pierced his breast with it quite through his armor, two inches deep, so that he fell from his horse with the stroke. At which those that attended him being put to flight and disorder, he, rising with a few, among whom was Ctesias, and making his way to a little hill not far off, rested himself. But Cyrus, who was in the thick of the enemy, was carried off a great way by the wildness of his horse, the darkness which was now coming on making it hard for them to know him, and for his followers to find him. However, being made elate with victory, and full of confidence and force, he passed through them, crying out, and that more than once, in the Persian language, "Clear the way, villains, clear the way;" which they indeed did, throwing themselves down at his feet. But his tiara dropped off his head, and a young Persian, by name Mithridates, running by, struck a dart into one of his temples near his eye, not knowing who he was,

out of which wound much blood gushed, so that Cyrus, swooning and senseless, fell off his horse. The horse escaped, and ran about the field; but the companion of Mithridates took the trappings, which fell off, soaked with blood. And as Cyrus slowly began to come to himself, some eunuchs who were there tried to put him on another horse, and so convey him safe away. And when he was not able to ride, and desired to walk on his feet, they led and supported him, being indeed dizzy in the head and reeling, but convinced of his being victorious, hearing, as he went, the fugitives saluting Cyrus as king, and praying for grace and mercy. In the meantime, some wretched, poverty-stricken Caunians, who in some pitiful employment as camp-followers had accompanied the king's army, by chance joined these attendants of Cyrus, supposing them to be of their own party. But when, after a while, they made out that their coats over their breastplates were red, whereas all the king's people wore white ones, they knew that they were enemies. One of them, therefore, not dreaming that it was Cyrus, ventured to strike him behind with a dart. The vein under the knee was cut open, and Cyrus fell, and at the same time struck his wounded temple against a stone, and so died. Thus runs Ctesias's account, tardily, with the slowness of a blunt weapon, effecting the victim's death.

When he was now dead, Artasyras, the king's eye, passed by on horseback, and, having observed the eunuchs lamenting, he asked the most trusty of them, "Who is this, Pariscas, whom you sit here deploring?" He replied, "Do not you see, O Artasyras, that it is my master, Cyrus?" …

Source: Arthur Hugh Clough, ed., *Plutarch's Lives,* translated by John Dryden et al. (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/674/pg674.html.

19. AN ACCOUNT FROM QUINTUS CURTIUS RUFUS'S *HISTORY OF ALEXANDER* OF THE KING AND THE PERSIAN ARMY ON THE MARCH

Tradition and ceremony played an important role in the military culture of ancient Iran. Iranian armies were complex organizations with their own unique hierarchy, customs, traditions, and practices. In his History of Alexander, *the Roman author Quintus Curtius Rufus provides a vivid account of the Persian Achaemenid army during the reign of Darius III (Darayavaush III) (r. 336–330 BCE), the last king of the Achaemenid dynasty. Curtius describes some of the military traditions and practices of the ancient Persians, their order of the line of march, the attire of the king, and the uniforms and equipment of each unit as it prepared for battle.*

[8] It is a tradition among the Persians not to begin a march until after sunrise, and the day was already well advanced when the signal was given by trumpet from the king's tent. Above the tent, so that it would be visible to all, a representation of the sun gleamed in a crystal case. [9] The order of the line of march was as follows: in front, on silver altars, was carried the fire which the Persians called sacred and eternal. Next came the Magi, singing the traditional hymn, [10] and they were followed by 365 young men in scarlet cloaks, their number equaling the days of the year (for, in fact, the Persians divide the year into as many days as we do). [11] Then came the chariot consecrated to Jupiter, drawn by white horses, followed by a horse of extraordinary size, which the Persians called 'the Sun's horse'. [12] Those driving the horses were equipped with golden whips and white robes. Not far behind were ten carts amply decorated with relief carvings in gold and silver, [13] and these were followed by the cavalry of twelve nations of different cultures, variously armed. Next in line were the soldiers whom the Persians called the 'Immortals', some 10,000 in number. No other group were as splendidly bedecked in barbarian opulence: golden necklaces, clothes interwoven with gold, long-sleeved tunics actually studded with jewels. [14] After a short interval came the 15,000 men they call 'the king's kinsmen'. This troop was dressed almost like women, its extravagance rather than its fine arms catching the eye. [15] The column next to these comprised the so-called 'Doryphoroe', the men who usually looked after the king's wardrobe, and these preceded the royal chariot on which rode the king himself, towering above all others. [16] Both sides of the chariot were embossed with gold and silver representations of the gods; the yoke was studded with flashing gems and from it arose two golden images (each a cubit high) of Ninus and Belus respectively. Between these was a consecrated eagle made of gold and represented with wings outstretched.

[17] The sumptuous attire of the king was especially remarkable. His tunic was purple, interwoven with white at the centre, and his gold-embroidered cloak bore a gilded motif of hawks attacking each other with their beaks. [18] From his gilded belt, which he wore in the style of a woman, he had slung his scimitar, its scabbard made of a precious stone. [19] His royal head-dress, called a 'cidaris' by the Persians, was encircled by a blue ribbon flecked with white. [20] 10,000 spearmen carrying lances chased with silver and tipped with gold followed the king's chariot, [21] and to the right and left he was attended by some 200 of his most noble relatives. At the end of this column came 30,000 foot-soldiers followed by 400 of the king's horses.

Source: Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* Book 3, translated by John

Yardley, with an introduction and notes by Waldemar Heckel (London: Penguin, 1984), 8–21.

20. EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS WRITERS DESCRIBING THE WOMEN OF THE ACHAEMENID ROYAL HOUSE

The Iranian sources on the status and the role of women in ancient Persia are scant to the extreme. The Fortification and Treasury texts discovered at Persepolis in southern Iran as well as documents and tablets unearthed at Susa, Babylonia, and other urban centers of Mesopotamia provide us with insight into the social and economic role of women in the royal palace and the society at large. These sources reveal that royal women owned vast estates, which they visited on a regular basis. Female members of the royal family traveled extensively, managed their landed property, and administered their wealth individually and at times with assistance from others. Thus, women played an important role in the daily economic activities of the Persian Empire. Outside the royal family, women enjoyed employment opportunities. They earned wages and maintained their independent economic status. Some even served in the Persian army as units responsible for the security and protection of the queen and other female members of the royal family. The seven short excerpts below selected from the works of Greek and Roman writers provide useful information about the role of the female members of the royal family and how they appeared in public during the Achaemenid period.

Excerpt from Quintus Curtius Rufus's *History of Alexander*

Next, at a distance of one stade, came Sisigambis, the mother of Darius [Darius III], drawn in a carriage, and in another came his wife. A troop of women attended the queens on horseback. Then came the fifteen so-called "Armamaxae" [enclosed wagons used especially for carrying women and children] in which rode the king's children, their nurses and a herd of eunuchs (who are not at all held in contempt by these people). Next came the carriages of the 360 royal concubines, these also dressed in royal finery, and behind them 600 mules and 300 camels carried the king's money, with a guard of archers in attendance. After this column rode the wives of the king's relatives and friends, and hordes of camp-followers and servants. At the end, to close up the rear, were the light-armored troops with their respective leaders.

Source: Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* Book 3, translated by John Yardley, with an introduction and notes by Waldemar Heckel (London: Penguin, 1984), 22–25.

Excerpt from Plutarch's *Lives*

And whereas none usually sat down to eat with the king besides his mother and his wedded wife, the former being placed above, the other below him, Artaxerxes invited also to his table his two younger brothers, Ostanes and Oxathres. But what was the most popular thing of all among the Persians was the sight of his wife Statira's chariot, which always appeared with its curtains down, allowing her countrywomen to salute and approach her, which made the queen a great favorite with the people.

Source: Arthur Hugh Clough, ed., *Plutarch's Lives,* translated by John Dryden et al. (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/674/pg674.html.

Excerpt from Athenaeus's *The Deipnosophists*

Among the Persians, the queen tolerates the large number of concubines because the king rules his wife like as absolute monarch, and for another reason, according to Dinon in his *History of Persia,* because the queen is treated with reverence by the concubines; at any rate they do obeisance before her.

Source: Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists,* translated by Charles Burton Gulik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), XIII:556b.

Excerpt from the Works of Josephus

1. After the death of Xerxes, the kingdom came to be transferred to his son Cyrus, whom the Greeks called Artaxerxes. When this man had obtained the government over the Persians, the whole nation of the Jews, with their wives and children, were in danger of perishing; the occasion whereof we shall declare in a little time for it is proper, in the first place, to explain somewhat relating to this king, and how he came to marry a Jewish wife, who was herself of the royal family also, and who is related to have saved our nation: for when Artaxerxes had taken the kingdom, and had set governors over the hundred twenty and seven provinces, from India even unto Ethiopia, in the third year of his reign, he made a costly feast for his friends, and for the nations of Persia, and for their governors, such a one as was proper for a king to make, when he had a mind to make a public demonstration of his riches, and this for a hundred and four score days; after which he made a feast for other nations, and for the ambassadors, at Shushan, for seven days. Now this feast was ordered after the manner following: —He caused a tent to be pitched, which was supported by pillars of gold and silver, with curtains of linen and purple spread over them, that it might afford room for many ten thousands to sit down. The cups with which the waiters ministered were of gold, and adorned

with precious stones, for pleasure and for sight. He also gave orders to the servants, that they should not force them to drink by bringing them wine continually, as is the practice of the Persians, but to permit every one of the guests to enjoy himself according to his own inclination. Moreover, he sent messengers through the country, and gave order that they should have a remission of their labors, and should keep a festival many days, on account of his kingdom. In like manner did Vashti the queen gather her guests together, and made them a feast in the palace. Now the king was desirous to show her, who exceeded all other women in beauty to those that feasted with him, and he sent some to command her to come to his feast. But she, out of regard to the laws of the Persians, which forbid the wives to be seen by strangers, did not go to the king; and though he oftentimes sent the eunuchs to her, she did nevertheless stay away, and refused to come, till the king was so much irritated that he broke up the entertainment, and rose up, and called for those seven who had the interpretations of the laws committed to them, and accused his wife, and said, that he had been affronted by her, because that when she was frequently called by him to his feast, she did not obey him once. He therefore gave order that they should inform him what could be done by the law against her.

Source: Josephus, *The Complete Works,* translated by William Whiston (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 11.6.1.

Excerpt from Plutarch's *Lives*

Darius therefore requested Aspasia, in former time the most prized of the concubines of Cyrus, and now belonging to the king. She was by birth a Phocaean, of Ionia, born of free parents, and well educated. Once when Cyrus was at supper, she was led in to him with other women, who, when they were sat down by him, and he began to sport and dally and talk jestingly with them, gave way freely to his advances. But she stood by in silence, refusing to come when Cyrus called her, and when his chamberlains were going to force her towards him, said, "Whosoever lays hands on me shall rue it;" so that she seemed to the company a sullen and rude-mannered person. However, Cyrus was well pleased, and laughed, saying to the man that brought the women, "Do you not see of a certainty that this woman alone of all that came with you is truly noble and pure in character?" After which time he began to regard her, and loved her above all of her sex, and called her the Wise. But Cyrus being slain in the fight, she was taken among the spoils of his camp.

Source: Arthur Hugh Clough, ed., *Plutarch's Lives,* translated by John Dryden et al. (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/674/

pg674.html.

Excerpt from Athenaeus's *The Deipnosophists*

And so three hundred women watch over him. … These sleep throughout the day in order to stay awake at night, but at night they sing and play on harps continuously while the lamps burn; and the king takes his pleasure with them as concubines.

Source: Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists,* translated by Charles Burton Gulik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), XII:514b.

21. EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS WRITERS DESCRIBING IRANIAN CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

The rock reliefs from the Achaemenid period depict Darius I dressed in his royal garb seated on a high chair. These reliefs do not, however, describe the ceremonial activities during the royal investiture. The excerpt below from the Greek author Plutarch provides a very brief and fleeting description of the royal coronation of Artaxerxes II after the death of his father, Darius II. This excerpt also indicates that long after the death of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid state, and the transfer of the empire's capital from Pasargadae to Persepolis, Susa, and Ecbatana, Achaemenid kings returned to Pasargadae to inaugurate their reign.

Excerpt from Plutarch's *Lives* on the Investiture of a Persian Achaemenid King

It was not long after the decease of Darius that the king, his successor [Artaxerxes II], went to Pasargadae, to have the ceremony of his inauguration consummated by the Persian priests. There is a temple dedicated to a warlike goddess, whom one might liken to Minerva; into which when the royal person to be initiated has passed, he must strip himself of his own robe, and put on that which Cyrus the first wore before he was king; then, having devoured a frail of figs, he must eat turpentine, and drink a cup of sour milk. To which if they add any other rites, it is unknown to any but those that are present at them.

Source: Arthur Hugh Clough, ed., *Plutarch's Lives,* translated by John Dryden et al. (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/674/pg674.html.

Excerpt from Quintus Curtius Rufus's *History of Alexander* on Imperial Grandeur and Royal Costume

The sumptuous attire of the king was especially remarkable. His tunic

was purple, interwoven with white at the center, and his gold-embroidered cloak bore a gilded motif of hawks, attacking each other with their beaks. From his gilded belt, which he wore in the style of a woman, he had slung his scimitar, its scabbard made of a precious stone. His royal head-dress [diadem], called a "cidaris" by the Persians, was encircled by a blue ribbon flecked with white. 10,000 spearman carrying lances chased with silver and tipped with gold followed the king's chariot, and to the right and left he was attended by some 200 of his most noble relatives. At the end of this column came 30,000 foot-soldiers followed by 400 of the king's horses.

Source: Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* Book 3, translated by John Yardley, with an introduction and notes by Waldemar Heckel (London: Penguin, 1984), 17–21.

Excerpt from Plutarch's *Themistocles* on Making Obeisance to the King

Out of all the excellent laws we possess, we take most pride in honoring the king, and prostrating ourselves before him as the image of God who rules the universe. So, if you approve our customs and will make obeisance to him, you may see and speak to the king. But if you do not accept this, you will need to use other intermediaries to communicate with him; because it is against our customs for the king to grant audience to a man who refuses to pay him obeisance.

(28) When Themistocles was led into the king's presence, he kissed the ground in front of him and waited in silence.

Source: Plutarch, "Themistocles," in *Plutarch's Lives,* edited by Arthur Hugh Clough, translated by John Dryden et al. (London: J. M. Dent, 1912).

Excerpt from Athenaeus's *The Deipnosophists* on the King and His Chariot

Whenever the king descended from his chariot, Dinon says, he never leaped down, although the distance to the ground was small, nor did he lean on anyone's arm; rather, a golden stool was always set in place for him, and he descended by stepping on this; and the king's tool bearer attended him for this purpose.

Source: Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists,* translated by Charles Burton Gulik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), XII:514a.

Excerpt from Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* on the Gardener King

Thereupon Critobulus: Well, Socrates (said he), if such is his conduct, I

admit that the great king does pay attention to agriculture no less than to military affairs.

And besides all this (proceeded Socrates), nowhere among the various countries which he inhabits or visits does he fail to make it his first care that there shall be orchards and gardens, parks and "paradises," as they are called, full of all fair and noble products which the earth brings forth; and within these chiefly he spends his days, when the season of the year permits.

Crit. To be sure, Socrates, it is a natural and necessary conclusion that when the king himself spends so large a portion of his time there, his paradises should be furnished to perfection with trees and all else beautiful that earth brings forth.

Soc. And some say, Critobulus, that when the king gives gifts, he summons in the first place those who have shown themselves brave warriors, since all the ploughing in the world were but small gain in the absence of those who should protect the fields; and next to these he summons those who have stocked their countries best and rendered them productive, on the principle that but for the tillers of the soil the warriors themselves could scarcely live. And there is a tale told of Cyrus, the most famous prince, I need not tell you, who ever wore a crown, how on one occasion he said to those who had been called to receive the gifts, "it were no injustice, if he himself received the gifts due to warriors and tillers of the soil alike," for "did he not carry off the palm in stocking the country and also in protecting the goods with which it had been stocked?"

Crit. Which clearly shows, Socrates, if the tale be true, that this same Cyrus took as great a pride in fostering the productive energies of his country and stocking it with good things, as in his reputation as a warrior.

Soc. Why, yes indeed, had Cyrus lived, I have no doubt he would have proved the best of rulers, and in support of this belief, apart from other testimony amply furnished by his life, witness what happened when he marched to do battle for the sovereignty of Persia with his brother. Not one man, it is said, deserted from Cyrus to the king, but from the king to Cyrus tens of thousands. And this also I deem a great testimony to a ruler's worth, that his followers follow him of their own free will, and when the moment of danger comes refuse to part from him. Now this was the case with Cyrus. His friends not only fought their battles side by side with him while he lived, but when he died they too died battling around his dead body, one and all, excepting only Ariaeus, who was absent at his post on the left wing of the army. But there is another tale of this same Cyrus in connection with Lysander, who himself narrated it on one occasion to a friend of his in Megara.

Lysander, it seems, had gone with presents sent by the Allies to Cyrus, who entertained him, and amongst other marks of courtesy showed him his "paradise" at Sardis. Lysander was astonished at the beauty of the trees within, all planted at equal intervals, the long straight rows of waving branches, the perfect regularity, the rectangular symmetry of the whole, and the many sweet scents which hung about them as they paced the park. In admiration he exclaimed to Cyrus: "All this beauty is marvelous enough, but what astonishes me still more is the talent of the artificer who mapped out and arranged for you the several parts of this fair scene." Cyrus was pleased by the remark, and said: "Know then, Lysander, it is I who measured and arranged it all. Some of the trees," he added, "I planted with my own hands." Then Lysander, regarding earnestly the speaker, when he saw the beauty of his apparel and perceived its fragrance, the splendour also of the necklaces and armlets, and other ornaments which he wore, exclaimed: "What say you, Cyrus? did you with your own hands plant some of these trees?" whereat the other: "Does that surprise you, Lysander? I swear to you by Mithres, when in ordinary health I never dream of sitting down to supper without first practicing some exercise of war or husbandry in the sweat of my brow, or venturing some strife of honour, as suits my mood." "On hearing this," said Lysander to his friend, "I could not help seizing him by the hand and exclaiming, 'Cyrus, you have indeed good right to be a happy man, since you are happy in being a good man.'"

Source: Xenophon, "The Economist," in *The Works of Xenophon,* Vol. 3, Part 1, translated by H. G. Dakyns (New York: Macmillan, 1897), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1173/1173-h/1173-h.htm.

Excerpt from Herodotus's *Histories* Describing Persian Customs from a Greek Perspective

131. These are the customs, so far as I know, which the Persians practice:—Images and temples and altars they do not account it lawful to erect, nay they even charge with folly those who do these things; and this, as it seems to me, because they do not account the gods to be in the likeness of men, as do the Hellenes. But it is their wont to perform sacrifices to Zeus going up to the most lofty of the mountains, and the whole circle of the heavens they call Zeus: and they sacrifice to the Sun and the Moon and the Earth, to Fire and to Water and to the Winds: these are the only gods to whom they have sacrificed ever from the first; but they have learnt also to sacrifice to Aphrodite Urania, having learnt it both from the Assyrians and the Arabians; and the Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta, the Arabians Alitta, and the Persians Mitra.

132. Now this is the manner of sacrifice for the gods aforesaid which is established among the Persians:—they make no altars neither do they kindle fire; and when they mean to sacrifice they use no libation nor music of the pipe nor chaplets nor meal for sprinkling; but when a man wishes to sacrifice to any one of the gods, he leads the animal for sacrifice to an unpolluted place and calls upon the god, having his *tiara* wreathed round generally with a branch of myrtle. For himself alone separately the man who sacrifices may not request good things in his prayer, but he prays that it may be well with all the Persians and with the king; for he himself also is included of course in the whole body of Persians. And when he has cut up the victim into pieces and boiled the flesh, he spreads a layer of the freshest grass and especially clover, upon which he places forthwith all the pieces of flesh; and when he has placed them in order, a Magian man stands by them and chants over them a theogony (for of this nature they say that their incantation is), seeing that without a Magian it is not lawful for them to make sacrifices. Then after waiting a short time the sacrificer carries away the flesh and uses it for whatever purpose he pleases.

133. And of all days their wont is to honour most that on which they were born, each one: on this they think it right to set out a feast more liberal than on other days; and in this feast the wealthier of them set upon the table an ox or a horse or a camel or an ass, roasted whole in an oven, and the poor among them set out small animals in the same way. They have few solid dishes, but many served up after as dessert, and these not in a single course; and for this reason the Persians say that the Hellenes leave off dinner hungry, because after dinner they have nothing worth mentioning served up as dessert, whereas if any good dessert were served up they would not stop eating so soon. To wine-drinking they are very much given, and it is not permitted for a man to vomit or to make water in presence of another. Thus do they provide against these things; and they are wont to deliberate when drinking hard about the most important of their affairs, and whatsoever conclusion has pleased them in their deliberation, this on the next day, when they are sober, the master of the house in which they happen to be when they deliberate lays before them for discussion: and if it pleases them when they are sober also, they adopt it, but if it does not please them, they let it go: and that on which they have had the first deliberation when they are sober, they consider again when they are drinking.

134. When they meet one another in the roads, by this you may discern whether those who meet are of equal rank,—for instead of greeting by words they kiss one another on the mouth; but if one of

them is a little inferior to the other, they kiss one another on the cheeks, and if one is of much less noble rank than the other, he falls down before him and does worship to him. And they honour of all most after themselves those nations which dwell nearest to them, and next those which dwell next nearest, and so they go on giving honour in proportion to distance; and they hold least in honour those who dwell furthest off from themselves, esteeming themselves to be by far the best of all the human race on every point, and thinking that others possess merit according to the proportion which is here stated, and that those who dwell furthest from themselves are the worst. And under the supremacy of the Medes the various nations used also to govern one another according to the same rule as the Persians observe in giving honour, the Medes governing the whole and in particular those who dwelt nearest to themselves, and these having rule over those who bordered upon them, and those again over the nations that were next to them: for the race went forward thus ever from government by themselves to government through others.

135. The Persians more than any other men admit foreign usages; for they both wear the Median dress judging it to be more comely than their own, and also for fighting the Egyptian corselet: moreover they adopt all kinds of luxuries when they hear of them, and in particular they have learnt from the Hellenes to have commerce with boys. They marry each one several lawful wives, and they get also a much larger number of concubines.

136. It is established as a sign of manly excellence next after excellence in fight, to be able to show many sons; and to those who have most the king sends gifts every year: for they consider number to be a source of strength. And they educate their children, beginning at five years old and going on till twenty, in three things only, in riding, in shooting, and in speaking the truth: but before the boy is five years old he does not come into the presence of his father, but lives with the women; and it is so done for this reason, that if the child should die while he is being bred up, he may not be the cause of any grief to his father.

137. I commend this custom of theirs, and also the one which is next to be mentioned, namely that neither the king himself shall put any to death for one cause alone, nor any of the other Persians for one cause alone shall do hurt that is irremediable to any of his own servants; but if after reckoning he finds that the wrongs done are more in number and greater than the services rendered, then only he gives vent to his anger. Moreover they say that no one ever killed his own father or mother, but whatever deeds have been done which seemed to be of

this nature, if examined must necessarily, they say, be found to be due either to changelings or to children of adulterous birth; for, say they, it is not reasonable to suppose that the true parent would be killed by his own son.

138. Whatever things it is not lawful for them to do, these it is not lawful for them even to speak of: and the most disgraceful thing in their estimation is to tell a lie, and next to this to owe money, this last for many other reasons, but especially because it is necessary, they say, for him who owes money, also sometimes to tell lies: and whosoever of the men of the city has leprosy or whiteness of skin, he does not come into a city nor mingle with the other Persians; and they say that he has these diseases because he has offended in some way against the Sun: but a stranger who is taken by these diseases, in many regions they drive out of the country altogether, and also white doves, alleging against them the same cause. And into a river they neither make water nor spit, neither do they wash their hands in it, nor allow any other to do these things, but they reverence rivers very greatly. …

140. So much I am able to say for certain from my own knowledge about them: but what follows is reported about their dead as a secret mystery and not with clearness, namely that the body of a Persian man is not buried until it has been torn by a bird or a dog. (The Magians I know for a certainty have this practice, for they do it openly). However that may be, the Persians cover the body with wax and then bury it in the earth. Now the Magians are distinguished in many ways from other men, as also from the priests in Egypt: for these last esteem it a matter of purity to kill no living creature except the animals which they sacrifice; but the Magians kill with their own hands all creatures except dogs and men, and they even make this a great end to aim at, killing both ants and serpents and all other creeping and flying things.

Source: Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus,* Vol. 1, Book 1.131–141, translated by G. C. Macaulay (New York: Macmillan, 1890).

22. PERSIAN MENU AND AN EXCERPT RELATING TO PERSIAN DINING

Preparing, serving, and eating food played an important role in the daily life of ancient Iranians. Cooking the food for Iranian kings was one of the most important daily responsibilities of the palace and the imperial kitchen, which during the Achaemenid period (550–330 BCE) served dinner to over 15,000 guests, including members of the royal family, the court, and the

imperial government. Iranian kings boasted of their hospitality by organizing lavish banquets, where guests feasted on sumptuous meals that included a variety of dishes and unique spices and were served from elaborately designed plates and drinking vessels, which were so brilliantly ornamented that they gleamed with gold and silver. After the fall of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BCE, Alexander the Macedon, who was touring a Persian royal palace, came across a list of ingredients used for the preparation of breakfast and dinner for the kings of the Achaemenid dynasty. The list of ingredients was inscribed on the same bronze pillar where the laws introduced by Cyrus had been written. This list of ingredients demonstrates the richness and variety of Persian cuisine and the large quantity of food prepared for the residents of the royal court.

Ancient Persian Menu

(32) In the palace of the Persian monarch Alexander read a bill of fare for the king's dinner and supper, that was engraven on a column of brass: on which were also other regulations, which Cyrus had directed. It ran thus.

"Of fine wheat flour four hundred artabae (a Median artaba is an Attic bushel). Of second flour three hundred artabae, and of third flour the same: in the whole one thousand artabae of wheat flour for supper. Of the finest barley flour two hundred artabae, of the second four hundred, and four hundred of the third: in all one thousand artabae of barley flour. Of oatmeal two hundred artabae. Of paste mixed for pastry of different kinds ten artabae. Of cresses chopped small, and sifted, and formed into a kind of ptisan, ten artabae. Of mustard-seed the third of an artabae. Male sheep four hundred. Oxen a hundred. Horses thirty. Fat geese four hundred. Three hundred turtles. Small birds of different kinds six hundred. Lambs three hundred. Gosslings a hundred. Thirty head of deer. Of new milk ten marises (a maris contains ten attic choas). Of milk whey sweetened ten marises. Of garlick a talent's worth. Of strong onions half a talent's worth. Of knot grass an artaba. Of the juice of benzoin two minae. Of cumin an artaba. Of benzoin a talent worth. Of rich cider the fourth of an artaba. Of millet seed three talents worth. Of anise flowers three minae. Of coriander seed the third of an artaba. Of melon seed two capises. Of parsnips ten artabae. Of sweet wine five marises. Of salted gongylis five marises. Of pickled capers five marises. Of salt ten artabae. Of Ethiopian cumin six capises (a capise is an attic chaenix). Of dried anise thirty minae. Of parsley feed four capises. Oil of Sisamin ten marises. Cream five marises. Oil of cinnamon five marises. Oil of acanthus five marises. Oil of sweet almonds three marises. Of dried sweet almonds three artabae. Of wine five hundred marises.

(And if he supped at Babylon or Susa, one half was palm wine, and the other half wine expressed from grapes.) Two hundred load of dry wood, and one hundred load of green. Of fluid honey a hundred square palathae, containing the weight of about ten minae. When he was in Media, there were added—of bastard saffron feed three artabae: of saffron two minae. This was the appointment for dinner and supper. He also expended in largesses five hundred artabae of fine wheat flour. Of fine barley flour a thousand artabae: and of other kinds of flour a thousand artabae. Of rice five hundred artabae. Of corn five hundred marises. Of corn for the horses twenty thousand artabae. Of straw ten thousand load. Of vetches five thousand load. Of oil of Sisamin two hundred marises. Of vinegar a hundred marises. Of cresses chopped small thirty artabae. All, that is here enumerated, was distributed among the forces, that attended him. In dinner, and supper, and in largessess, the above was the king's daily expenditure."

Source: Polyaenus, *Stratagems of War,* translated by E. Shepherd (London, 1793), http://websfor.org/alexander/polyaenus/intro.asp.

Dining with the Persians

Heracleides of Cumae, author of the *Persian History,* writes, in the second book of the work entitled *Equipment:* "All who attend upon the Persian kings when they dine first bathe themselves and then serve in white clothes, and spend nearly half the day on preparations for the dinner. Of those who are invited to eat with the king, some dine outdoors, in full sight of anyone who wishes to look on; others dine indoors in the king's company. Yet even these do not eat in his presence, for there are two rooms opposite each other, in one of which the king has his meal, in the other the invited guests. The king can see through the curtain at the door, but they cannot see him. Sometimes, however, on the occasion of a public holiday, all dine in a single room with the king, in the great hall. And whenever the king commands a symposium (which he does often), he has about a dozen companions at the drinking. When they have finished, that is, the king by himself, the guests in the other room, these fellow drinkers are summoned by one of the eunuchs; and entering they drink with him, though even they do not have the same wine; moreover, they sit on the floor, while he reclines on a couch supported by feet of gold; and they depart after having drunk to excess. In most cases the king breakfasts and dines alone, but sometimes his wife and some of his sons dine with him. And throughout the dinner his concubines sing and play the lyre; one of them is the soloist, the others sing in chorus. And so, Heracleides continues, the 'king's dinner,' as it is called, will appear prodigal to one who merely hears about it, but when one examines it carefully it

will be found to have been got up with economy and even with parsimony; and the same is true of the dinners among other Persians in high station. For one thousand animals are slaughtered daily for the king; these comprise horses, camels, oxen, asses, deer, and most of the smaller animals; many birds also are consumed, including Arabian ostriches—and the creature is large—geese; and cocks. And of all these only moderate portions are served to each of the king's guests, and each of them may carry home whatever he leaves untouched at the meal. But the greater of these meats and other foods are taken out into the courtyard for the body-guard and light-armed troopers maintained by the king; there they divide all the half-eaten remnants of meat and bread and share them in equal portions. Just as hired soldiers in Greece receive their wages in money, so these men receive food from the king in requital for services. Similarly among other Persians of high rank, all the food is served on the table at one and the same time; but when their guests have done eating, whatever is left from the table, consisting chiefly of meat and bread, is given by the officer in charge of the table to each of the slaves; this they take and so obtain their daily food. Hence the most highly honoured of the king's guests go to court only for breakfast for they beg to be excused in order that they may not be required to go twice, but may be able to entertain their own guests."

Source: Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists,* translated by Charles Burton Gulick (London: William Heinemann, 1927), 4.145–146.

23. PARTHIA AND THE RISE OF THE ARSACID (PARTHIAN) DYNASTY ACCORDING TO CLASSICAL SOURCES

The origins of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty and the events that led to the rise of the Arsacid monarch Arsaces I (Arshak I) (r. 247/238–217 BCE), founder of the Arsacid state (247/238 BCE–224 CE), are shrouded in mystery. The absence of reliable Arsacid (Parthian) sources has forced historians of ancient Iran to rely almost exclusively on the accounts of Greek and Roman writers, who were resolute and unyielding in their hostility and disdain toward the Parthians, portraying them as vulgar, uncultured, and backward barbarians with eccentric and repugnant customs and traditions. The rise of Arsaces I corresponded with the growing decline of the Seleucid state, which had ruled Iran since 305 BCE after the disintegration of the short-lived empire of Alexander the Macedon and a civil war that subsequently erupted among his Macedonian generals. The incessant military campaigns against the Ptolemaic dynasty centered in Egypt exhausted the Seleucid treasury and diverted the attention of its rulers from the eastern provinces of their empire. Antioch, which served as the capital of the Seleucid kings, was situated on the western borders of the empire and a long way away from Iran and Central Asia. In 238 BCE, Arsaces I took advantage of the chaos in the eastern provinces of the Seleucid state and invaded and conquered Parthia. With the conquest of Parthia, the Arsacids came to be known as Parthians, or as those who hailed from Parthia. The seven short accounts below provide a synopsis of how Greek and Roman sources portrayed the rise of Arsaces, founder of the Arsacid dynasty, and the process through which the Arsacid (Parthian) kingdom was founded. They also offer noteworthy albeit highly biased information on the Parthian government, army, and culture.

Arrian's Account of the Rise of Arsaces (Arshak), the Founder of the Arsacid or Parthian Empire

Read Arrian's *Parthica* (History of Parthia) in seventeen books. In the *Parthica* he gives an account of the wars between Parthia and Rome during the reign of Trajan. He considers the Parthians to have been a Scythian race, which had long been under the yoke of Macedonia, and revolted, at the time of the Persian rebellion, for the following reason. Arsaces and Tiridates were two brothers, descendants of Arsaces, the son of Phriapetes. These two brothers, with five accomplices, slew Pherecles, who had been appointed satrap of Parthia by Antiochus Theos, to avenge an insult offered to one of them; they drove out the Macedonians, set up a government of their own, and became so powerful that they were a match for the Romans in war, and

sometimes even were victorious over them.

Source: J. H. Freese, ed., *Translations of Christian Literature: The Library of Photius,* Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1920).

Emergence of the Parthian Empire in the East: Arsaces and His Immediate Successors in Justin's *History of the World*

Chap I. The Parthians, who are now in possession of the empire of the East, having, as it were, divided the world with the Romans, came originally from Scythian exiles. … Being thrice attack'd by the Romans, under the conduct of their greatest generals, in the most flourishing times of the Republic, they alone, of all nations, were not only a match for them, but came off victorious, yet perhaps it was still greater glory for them to be able to rule, amidst the Assyrian, Median, and Persian kingdoms, so famous of old, and the most opulent empire of Bactria, consisting of a thousand cities, than that they defeated a people that came from so remote a part of the world, especially when at that time they were incessantly alarmed by the Scythians, and their other neighbours, and exposed to so many uncertainties of war. They being forced to leave Scythia, by seditions at home, did, by stealth, possess themselves of the departs between Hyrcania, and Dahae, the Arians, the Spartans, and the Margians. After which, their neighbours, not resisting at first, they, at last, in spite of their opposition, when they came too late to hinder them, so far extended their frontiers, that they not only took possession of vast plains, but also of craggy hills, and steep mountains. And hence it comes, that the heat and cold are excessive in several provinces of Parthia; for the snow is troublesome in the mountainous parts, and the heat in the plains. …

Chap II. This nation was under kingly government after the revolt from the Macedonian empire. With them the chiefs of the populace were next in power to the king. Out of them were chosen their generals in war, and their governors in peace. Their language is a mixture of the Median and Scythian, borrowing words from both. …

Chap IV. And afterwards, when the Macedonians were involved in a civil war, they with the rest of the nations of Upper Asia, followed Eunenes; and when he was defeated, they went over to Antigonus. After him, they were under Nicator Seleucus, and soon after, under Antiochus, and his successors, from whose grandson Seleucus, they first revolted in the first Punic war, … the divisions of the two brothers, Seleucus and Antiochus, procured them an impunity for this revolt, who, during their contentions to wrest the scepter out of one another's hands, neglected to pursue the revolters. At the same time, Theodotus too, the governor of the thousand cities of Bactria revolted, and commanded himself to be called King, which example, all the

Eastern nations soon followed, and shook off the Macedonian yoke. There was, at this time, one Arsaces, a man of tried valour, though of uncertain extraction. He, being accustomed to live by robbery and plunder, having heard that Seleucus had been overthrown by the Gauls in Asia, fearing the king no longer, entered the country of the Parthians with a band of robbers, defeated and killed Andragoras, his lieutenant, and seized the government of the whole country. Not long after, he likewise made himself master of Hyrcania; and being now in possession of two kingdoms, he raised a great army, for fear of Seleucus, and Theodotus king of the Bactrians. But being soon delivered from his fears, by the death of Theodotus, he makes peace, and enters into an alliance with his son, who was … named Theodotus, and not long after, engaging with king Seleucus, who came to punish the revolters, he had a victory; and this day the Parthians observe ever since with great solemnity, as the commencement of their liberty.

Chap V. Some new disturbances obliging Seleucus to return into Asia, some respite was, by this means, given to Arsaces, who took this opportunity to establish the Parthian government, levy soldiers, fortify castles, and secure the fidelity of his cities. He built a city too, called Dara. … Thus Arsaces having at once acquired and established a kingdom, was no less memorable among the Parthians, than Cyrus among the Persians, Alexander among the Macedonians, or Romulus among the Romans, and he died in a good old age. To his memory the Parthians paid this honour with you, that from him they called all their kings by the name Arsaces. His son and successor in the kingdom, who was Arsaces by name, fought with great bravery against Antiochus, the son of Seleucus, who came against him with a hundred thousand foot, and twenty thousand horse, and, at last, made an alliance with him. The third king of the Parthians was Priapatius, but he too was named Arsaces, for, as was said above, they called all their kings by that name, as the Romans do theirs Caesar and Augustus. He died, after he had reigned fifteen years, leaving two sons, Mithridates and Phraates, the elder of whom, Phraates, being, according to the custom of this nation, heir of the kingdom, subdued, by his arms, the Mardians, a strong nation, and died not long after, leaving several sons behind him whom he passed by, and left his kingdom to his brother Mithridates, a man of uncommon abilities, judging that more was due to the name of the king, than that of father; and that he ought to prefer the interest of his country to the grandeur of his children.

Source: Justin, *History of the World,* translated by G. Turnbull, Book 41 (London: Printed for S. Birt, and B. Dod, 1746), chaps. I–VI.

Origins of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire According to Ammianus Marcellinus

2. This kingdom, which was once small … after the fates had taken off Alexander the Great at Babylon, took its name from the Parthian Arsaces, a man of low birth; he had been a brigand chief during his younger days, but since his ideals gradually changed for the better, by a series of brilliant exploits he rose to greater heights. 3. After many glorious and valiant deeds, and after he had conquered Seleucus Nicator, successor of the said Alexander, on whom his many victories had conferred that surname, and had driven out the Macedonian garrison, he passed his life in quiet peace, and was a mild ruler and judge of his subjects. 4. Finally, after all the neighboring lands had been brought under his rule, by force, by regards for justice, or by fear, and he had filled Persia with cities, with fortified camps, and with strongholds, and to all the neighbouring peoples, which she previously feared, he had made her a constant cause of dread, he died a peaceful death in middle life. And nobles and commons rivaled each other in agreeing to place him among the stars (as they believe) according to the sacred custom of their country; and he was the first of all to be so honoured. 5. Hence to this very day the over-boastful kings of that race suffer themselves to be called brothers of the Sun and Moon, and just as for our emperors the title of Augustus is beloved and coveted, so to the Parthian kings, … there fell the very greatest increase in distinction, won by the happy auspices of Arsaces.

Source: *Ammianus Marcellinus,* Translated by John C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 23.6, 2–6.

Parthian Government and Army

Chap II. The Government of The Nation, after their revolt from the Empire of the Macedons was under kings. The order or estate of the commons is next the majesty of kings; from hence they derive both generals in war and magistrates in peace. Their speech is mixed between the Scythian language and the Median. They are clothed after their old custom; and if their fortunes do grow high, they are appareled like the Medes, with a garment translucently thin and fluent. In their wars, they use both their own and the Scythian discipline. They have not as other nations, an army composed of free-men, but the greatest part of it … consist of servants. … They bring up these with as great care as they do their own children, and teach them both to ride and shoot with great industry. As everyone who is more rich, so in the service of the war he brings in more hordes to the king. When fifty thousand of their cavalry did meet Mark Antony in the

field making war upon them, they were not above four hundred and fifty of them that were free born. They are not used to fight hand in hand, or to maintain a siege before a city. They fight always with their horses, either charging or wheeling about; they often counterfeit themselves to be routed, that they stop and return with the greater advantage, whereby they both find their pursuers to lie open to their swords and unprepared to receive the second impression of their charge. Their sound unto the battle is not given by trumpet, but by a drum; neither do they long hold out in fight. … Often times in the very heat of the first charge they forsake their battle, and after their fight they will immediately rally and renew the fight again, and when you think you are most sure of conquest the greatest difficulty and danger of the battle is to come. Their defense for themselves and for their horses, are plumed coats of mail on which are such waving plumes that they cover all the bodies of both. They have no use either of gold or silver, but only on their armor. …

Source: Marcus Junianus Justin, *History of Justin Taken Out of the Four and Forty Books of Trogus Pompeius,* translated into English by Robert Codrington, Book 41 (London: William Gilbertson, 1664), chap II.

The Parthians, Their Land, and Their Government According to Strabo

As for the Parthian country, it is not large; at any rate, it paid its tribute along with the Hyrcanians in the Persian times, and also after this, when for a long time the Macedonians held the mastery. And, in addition to its smallness, it is thickly wooded and mountainous, and also poverty-stricken, so that on this account the kings send their own throngs through it in great haste, since the country is unable to support them even for a short time. At present, however, it has increased its extent. Parts of the Parthian country are Comisenê and Chorenê, and, one may almost say, the whole region that extends as far as the Caspian Gates and Rhagae and the Tapyri, which formerly belonged to Media. …

But when revolutions were attempted by the countries outside the Taurus, because of the fact that the kings of Syria and Media, who were in possession also of these countries, were busily engaged with others, those who had been entrusted with their government first caused the revolt of Bactriana [Bactria] and of all the country near it, I mean Euthydemus and his followers; and then Arsaces, a Scythian, with some of the Dāae (I mean the Aparnians, as they were called, nomads who lived along the Ochus), invaded Parthia and conquered it. Now at the outset Arsaces was weak, being continually at war with those who had been deprived by him of their territory, both he

himself and his successors, but later they grew so strong, always taking the neighbouring territory, through successes in warfare, that finally they established themselves as lords of the whole of the country inside the Euphrates. And they also took a part of Bactriana, having forced the Scythians, and still earlier Eucratides and his followers, to yield to them; and at present time they rule over so much land and so many tribes that in the size of their empire they have become, in a way, rivals of the Romans. The cause of this is their mode of life, and also their customs, which contain much that is barbarian and Scythian in character, though more that is conducive to hegemony and success at war. … At any rate, some say that Arsaces derives his origin from the Scythians, whereas others say that he was a Bactrian, and that when in flight from the enlarged power of Diodotus and his followers he caused Parthia to revolt. … I shall mention this alone, that the Council of the Parthians, according to Poseidonius, consists of two groups, one that of kinsmen, and the other that of wise men and Magi, from both of which groups the kings were appointed.

Source: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo,* translated by Horace Leonard Jones (London: William Heinemann, 1928), 11.9.1–10.1.

The Parthian Army

These people [the Parthians] dwell beyond the Tigris for the most part in forts and garrisons, but also in a few cities, among them Ctesiphon, in which they have a royal residence. Their race was in existence among the ancient barbarians and they had the same name even under the Persian kingdom; but at that time they inhabited only a small portion of the country and had acquired no dominion beyond their own borders. But when the Persian rule had been overthrown and that of the Macedonians was at its height, and when the successors of Alexander had quarreled with one another, cutting off separate portions for themselves and setting up individual monarchies, the Parthians then first attained prominence under a certain Arsaces, from whom their succeeding rulers received the title of Arsacidae [Arsacids]. By good fortune they acquired all the neighboring territory, occupied Mesopotamia by means of satrapies, and finally advanced to so great glory and power as to wage war even against the Romans at that time, and ever afterward down to the present day to be considered a match for them. They are really formidable in warfare, but nevertheless they have a reputation greater than their achievements, because, in spite of their not having gained anything from the Romans, and having, besides, given up certain portions of their own domain, they have not yet been enslaved, but even to this day hold their own in the wars they wage against us, whenever they

become involved in them. Now about their race and their country and their peculiar customs many have written, and I have no intention of describing them. But I will describe their equipment of arms and their method of warfare; for the examination of these details properly concerns the present narrative, since it has come to a point where this knowledge is needed. The Parthians make no use of a shield, but their forces consist of mounted archers and pikemen, mostly in full armour. Their infantry is small, made up of the weaker men; but even these are all archers. They practice from boyhood, and the climate and the land combine to aid both horsemanship and archery. The land, being for the most part level, is excellent for raising horses and very suitable for riding about on horse-back; at any rate, even in war they lead about whole droves of horses so that they can use different ones at different times, can ride up suddenly from a distance and also retire to a distance speedily; and the atmosphere there, which is very dry and does contain the least moisture, keeps their bow strings tense, except in the dead of winter. For that reason they make no campaigns anywhere during that season; but the rest of the year they are almost invincible in their own country and in any that has similar characteristics. For by long experience they can endure the sun's heat, which is very scorching, and they have discovered many remedies for the dearth of drinking-water and the difficulty of securing it, so that for this reason also they can easily repel the invaders of their land. Outside of this district beyond the Euphrates they have once or twice gained success in pitched battles and in sudden incursions, but they cannot wage an offensive war with any nation continuously and without pause, both because they encounter an entirely different condition of land and sky and because they do not lay in supplies of food or pay. Such is the Parthian state.

Source: Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History,* translated by Ernest Cary (London: William Heinemann, 1914), XL:14–16.

Parthian Customs

Each particular man was allowed to have several wives, for the pleasure of variety, and they punish no crime so severely as adultery. To prevent it, they not only exclude their women from their feasts, but forbid them the very sight of men. They eat no flesh, but what they take by hunting. They ride on horseback at all times; on horse they go to feasts, pay civilities, public and private, march out, stand still, traffic, converse. This, in fine, is the difference between slaves and free-men that the slaves go on foot, free-men on horseback.

Source: Justin, *History of the World,* translated by G. Turnbull (London: Printed for S. Birt and B. Dod, 1746), XLI:III.

24. PERSONALITY AND CAMPAIGNS OF THE ARSACID KING MITHRIDATES I IN WESTERN SOURCES

Mithridates I (r. 171–139/138 BCE) was one of the most successful kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty. During his reign, the Parthian state was transformed from a kingdom centered in northeastern Iran into a major empire ruling a vast territory extending from the shores of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in Central Asia to Mesopotamia in the heart of the ancient Near East. Mithridates I was a son of the Arsacid monarch Priapatius (r. 191–176 BCE) and the younger brother of the Arsacid king Phraates I (Frahata I) (r. 176–171 BCE). After the death of their father, Mithridates's brother Phraates I ascended the throne. Phraates I defeated the Mardi, a tribal group who resided in the eastern regions of the Alborz mountain range, and expanded the boundaries of the Arsacid state from northeastern Iran to the lands south of the Alborz range and west of the Caspian Gates. When Phraates I died, he was succeeded by his brother Mithridates. Building on his brother's military successes, Mithridates I embarked on an ambitious campaign of his own to expand the territory of the Arsacid kingdom. The exact dates of Mithridates's impressive conquests are uncertain. However, it seems that his first major victory was achieved against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom based in present-day northern Afghanistan. He then pushed westward and conquered Media in present-day north-central and western Iran sometime in 148 or 147 BCE. The Parthian armies then moved into Mesopotamia and captured Babylonia, including the city of Seleucia-on-Tigris, by 141 BCE. Before he could complete his conquest of Mesopotamia, however, Mithridates I was forced to shift his focus to the eastern borders of his kingdom and guard against nomadic invasions from Central Asia. In the absence of their king, Parthian armies continued their military operations in southwestern Iran, defeating the Elymais in present-day southwestern Iran and seizing the important city of Susa. The impressive victories of Mithridates I forced the Seleucid monarch Demetrius II to respond by invading Mesopotamia and western Iran. This campaign proved to be disastrous for the Seleucid monarch, who was defeated and captured by the Parthians. The humiliated Demetrius was sent to Mithridates I in Hyrcania (modern-day Gorgan) in northern Iran. Mithridates treated the defeated Seleucid king with kindness and respect. He also arranged for a marriage between Demetrius and his daughter, Rhodogune. Between 139 and 132 BCE, Parthian armies reconquered southwestern Iran and southern Iraq, including the important city of Babylon. Mithridates I also extended the boundaries of his empire in the east, but the extent of his territorial conquests in this instance remains uncertain. After a long and successful reign of 43 or 44 years, Mithridates I, who had assumed the title "great king," died in either 139 or 138 BCE and was succeeded by his son Phraates II. The two excerpts below, which

have been taken from the writings of Diodorus Siculus and Justin, reflect the views of Greek and Roman historians on Mithridates I as a king and a leader.

Mithridates I According to Diodorus Siculus

18. King Arsaces [Mithridates I] by pursuing a set policy of clemency and humanity, won an automatic stream of advantages and further enlarged his kingdom. For he extended his power even to India, and without a battle brought under his sway the region once ruled by Porus. But, though raised to such heights of royal power, he did not cultivate luxury or arrogance, the usual accompaniments of power, but prided himself on the exercise of equity towards those who accepted his rule and courage towards those who opposed him. In short, having made himself master over many peoples, he taught the Parthians the best of the customs practiced by each.

Source: *Diodorus of Sicily,* translated by C. H. Oldfather (London: William Heinemann, 1933), XXXIII:18.

The Campaigns of Mithridates I

Almost at the same time as Mithridates among the Parthians, so Eucratides among the Bactrians, both princes of great merit, began to reign. But the uncommon good fortune of the Parthians, brought them, under this monarch, to the highest pitch of greatness. The Bactrians, on the other hand, being distressed by several wars, not only lost their sovereignty, but their liberty, for being exhausted by wars with the Sogdians, Drangians, and the Indians, were, like a people quite enfeebled and expiring, subdued by the Persians [Parthians], who had been, a little before, much weaker than they. However Eucratides carried on many wars with great vigour, and though his losses had weakened him, yet being besieged by Demetrius, king of the Indians, with only three hundred soldiers, he made continual sallies, and so fatigued the enemy, consisting of sixty thousand men, that he obliged them to raise the siege. Wherefore, being delivered from the siege, in the fifth month, he reduced India under his power, but in his return from thence, he was assassinated by his son, whom he had made his partner in the kingdom; who was so far from concealing the patricide, that, as if he had killed an enemy, and not his father, he drove his chariot through his blood, and ordered his body to be thrown out unburied. During these transactions in Bactria, a war breaks out between the Parthians and the Medes. After the success of this war had for some time been various, victory at last, fell to the Parthians. Mithridates, enforced with this addition to his

strength, sets Bacasis over Media, and goes himself into Hyrcania, from whence returning, he made war upon the king of the Elymaeans, and, after the conquest of him, he added this nation likewise to his dominions, and so extended the Parthian empire, from among Caucasus, as far as the river Euphrates by reducing many nations under his yoke. After this, being seized with an illness, he died in an honourable old age, not at all inferior in glory to his grandfather Arsaces.

Source: Justin, *History of the World,* translated by G. Turnbull (London: Printed for S. Birt and B. Dod, 1746), XLI:VI.

25. DIODORUS SICULUS'S ACCOUNT OF THE VICTORY OF ARSACID KING PHRAATES II OVER THE SELEUCID KING ANTIOCHUS VII

Phraates II (Frahata II) was a monarch of the Arsacid dynasty who ruled from 139/138 to 128 BCE. He was the son of the Arsacid monarch Mithridates I (Mithradata I). Phraates inherited an empire threatened by enemies in both the east and the west. The northeastern frontiers of the Parthian Empire had been breached by invading nomadic tribes from Central Asia. These tribes were known as Yüeh-chih (Yuezhi) in Chinese and Tochari by Greek and Roman writers. While Phraates was busy fighting the Tochari tribes in the east, the Seleucid king Antiochus VII (r. 138–129 BCE) attacked and seized Babylonia and Media, defeating Parthian armies in three separate military encounters. Phraates II sent an embassy to negotiate a peace agreement with the Seleucid monarch. Antiochus VII responded that he was willing to cease hostilities and conclude a treaty if the Arsacid monarch would release his brother Demetrius from captivity, withdraw from the provinces he had seized, and pay tribute to the Seleucid king as his overlord. Phraates rejected these demands. With winter arriving, Antiochus divided his army and scattered its various units in several cities in western Iran. The oppressive behavior of these army units, who demanded food and supplies, caused the populace to revolt against Antiochus VII. Phraates used this opportunity to march against the Seleucid forces. When the two armies clashed, the Parthians defeated the Seleucid army and killed Antiochus VII. The defeat and death of Antiochus VII put an end to Seleucid presence in Iran. The excerpt below, written by the historian Diodorus Siculus, describes the battle between the Seleucid king Antiochus VII and the Arsacid monarch Phraates II.

15. When spring with its warmth was melting the snow, and crops were now, after the long period of frost, beginning to develop and grow, and men, too were resuming their activity, Arsaces [Phraates II

Arsaces VII (r. 139/138–128 BCE)] wishing to feel out his enemies, sent envoys to discuss terms of peace. In reply Antiochus told them that he would agree to the peace if Arsaces would release his brother Demetrius from captivity and send him home, if he would withdraw from the satrapies that he had seized by force, and if, retaining only his ancestral domain, he would pay tribute. Arsaces, taking offense at the harshness of the reply, placed an army in the field against him.

16. His friends pleaded with Antiochus not to join battle with the far more numerous Parthian hordes, since they, by taking refuge in the mountainous country that overlooked them, with its rough terrain, could neutralize the threat of his cavalry. Antiochus, however, completely disregarded their advice, remarking that it was disgraceful for the victorious to fear any ventures of those whom they had previously defeated. So, exhorting his men to the fray, he awaited with stout heart the onslaught of the barbarians.

Source: *Diodorus Siculus,* translated by C. H. Oldfather (London: William Heinemann, 1933), XXIV:15–17.

26. TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE

For centuries before the arrival of Islam, China and Iran enjoyed a very close diplomatic, commercial, and cultural relationship. During the reign of the Arsacid monarch Mithridates II (Mithradata II) (r. 124/123–88/87 BCE), an envoy of Emperor Wudi (r. 141–87 BCE) of China's Han dynasty (r. 206 BCE–220 CE) arrived at the Arsacid court. The envoy returned to China accompanied by representatives of the Parthian monarch bearing gifts of ostrich eggs and conjurers. These negotiations were followed by the establishment of the first intercontinental trade route between China, Iran, and Rome. Mithridates II sent ambassadors to Rome and China to expand and augment this international trade route. The so-called Silk Road, which in fact consisted of numerous trade routes, not only created a direct commercial link between China, Central Asia, Iran, and Rome but also heralded the exchange of goods, ideas, and technology between East Asia, the Near East, and Europe. Direct economic ties with China allowed plants, spices, foodstuffs, medicine, and musical instruments as well as new ideas and religious beliefs from India and Iran to travel eastward. The two excerpts below describe the general geographical and cultural characteristics of the Arsacid (Parthian) Empire from a Chinese and a Roman perspective.

A Chinese Account of the Parthian Empire

Anxi [Parthia] is situated several thousand *li* west of the region of the Great Yuezhi. The people are settled on the land, cultivating the fields

and growing rice and wheat. They also make wine out of grapes. They have walled cities like the people of Dayuan [Farghana], the region containing several hundred cities of various sizes. The kingdom, which borders the Gui [Oxus River], is very large, measuring several thousand *li* square. Some of the inhabitants are merchants who travel by cart or boats to neighboring countries, sometimes journeying several thousand *li*. The coins of the country are made of silver and bear the face of the king. When the king dies, the currency is immediately changed and new coins issued with the face of his successor. The people keep records by writing horizontally on strips of leather. To the west lies Tiaozhi (Mesopotamia) and to the north Yancai and Lixuan (Hyrcania).

Tiaozhi is situated several thousand *li* west of Anxi [Parthia] and borders the western sea (Persian Gulf?). It is hot and damp, and the people live by cultivating the fields and planting rice. In this region live great birds which lay eggs as large as pots. The people are very numerous and are ruled by many petty chiefs. The ruler of Anxi [Parthia] gives orders to these chiefs and regards them as his vassals. The people are very skillful at performing tricks that amaze the eye. …

When the Han envoys first visited the kingdom of Anxi [Parthia], the king of Anxi dispatched a party of 20,000 horsemen to meet them on the eastern border of his kingdom. The capital of the kingdom is several thousand *li* from the eastern border, and as the envoys proceeded there they passed through twenty or thirty cities inhabited by great numbers of people. When the Han envoys set out again to return to China, the king of Anxi dispatched envoys of his own to accompany them, and after the latter had visited China and reported on its great breadth and might, the king sent some of the eggs of the great birds which live in the region, and skilled tricksters of Lixuan, to the Han court as gifts. In addition, the smaller states west of Dayuan [Farghana], such as Huanqian and Dayi, as well as those east of Dayuan, such as Gushi, Yumi, and Suxie, all sent parties to accompany the Han envoys back to China and present gifts at court. The emperor was delighted at this. …

After the skills of the foreign magicians and tricksters had been imported into China, the wrestling matches and displays of unusual feats developed and improved with each year, and from this time on entertainments of this type became increasingly popular. …

The regions around Dayuan [Farghana] make wine out of grapes, the wealthier inhabitants keeping as much as ten thousand or more piculs stored away. It can be kept for as long as twenty or thirty years without spoiling. The people love their wine and the horses love their alfalfa. The Han envoys brought back grape and alfalfa seeds to China

and the emperor for the first time tried growing these plants in areas of rich soil. Later, when the Han acquired large numbers of the "heavenly horses," and the envoys from foreign states began to arrive with their retinues, the lands on all sides of the emperor's summer palaces and pleasure towers were planted with grapes and alfalfa for as far as the eye could see.

Although the states from Dayuan [Farghana] west to Anxi [Parthia] speak rather different languages, their customs are generally similar and their languages mutually intelligible. The men all have deep-set eyes and profuse beards and whiskers. They are skillful at commerce and will haggle over a fraction of a cent. Women are held in great respect, and the men make decisions on the advice of their women.

Source: Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* translated by Burton Watson (Hong Kong and New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 234–236, 243. Reprinted with permission.

A Roman Account of the Parthian Empire

We will now give a brief account of the Parthian Empire.

XXIX. The Parthi possess in all eighteen kingdoms, such being the divisions of their provinces on the coasts of two seas, as we have stated, the Red Sea [the Persian Gulf] on the south and the Caspian Sea on the north. Of these provinces the eleven designated the Upper Kingdoms begin at the frontiers of Armenia and the shores of the Caspian, and extend to the Scythians, with whom the Parthians live on terms of equality. The remaining seven kingdoms are called the Lower Kingdoms. So far as the Parthi are concerned, there has always been a country named Parthyaea at the foot of the mountain range, … which forms the boundary of all these races. To the east of Parthyaea are the Arii, to the south Carmani and the Ariani, to the west the Pratitae, a Median race, and to the north the Hyrcani; and it is surrounded on all sides by desert. The remote Parthians are called the Nomads. Short of the desert on the west side are the Parthian cities mentioned above, Issatis and Calliope; north-east is Pyropum, south-east Maria, and in the middle Hecatompylos, Arsace, and the fine district of Parthyene, Nisiaea, containing the city name Alexandropolis after its founder.

At this point it is necessary also to indicate the geographical position of the Medes, and to trace the formation of the country round to the Persian Sea, in order that the rest of the account that follows may be more easily understood. Medea lies crosswise on the west side, meeting Parthia at an angle, and so shutting off both groups of Parthian kingdoms. Consequently it has the Caspian and Parthian

people on its east side, Sittacene, Susiane and Farsistan on the south, Adiabene on the west, and Armenia on the north. The Persians have always lived on the shore of the Red Sea [the Persian Gulf], which is the reason why it is called the Persian Gulf.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History,* translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), VI:XXIX.

27. EXCERPT FROM *PARTHIAN STATIONS* BY ISIDORE OF CHARAX

Parthian Stations *is an account of the overland trade route between the Levant and India in the first century BCE. The author of the text, which was written in Greek, is Isidore of Charax. Our knowledge regarding Isidore of Charax is extremely scanty. He most probably lived during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE), knew both Greek and Aramaic, and was identified with the town of Charax in present-day southern Iraq. The text of* Parthian Stations *offers a brief description of the main military and trade route crossing the Parthian Empire (247/238–224 CE) from west to east. The route began in the west at Zeugma on the banks of the Euphrates River in present-day southern Turkey, which marked the beginning of Parthian territory. It then moved eastward through 19 regions, first along the Euphrates to Seleucia-on-Tigris in present-day southern Iraq, then in a northeasterly direction toward Hagmatana/Ecbatana (modern-day Hamedan) in Media in western Iran, and then to Rhagae (Ray) south of modern-day Tehran and the Caspian Gates to Nisa, the first capital of the Parthian state in the present-day Republic of Turkmenistan. From there it continued through the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan, turning south to Aria in present-day northwestern Afghanistan and from there to Sistan in present-day eastern Iran, and finally ending in Arachosia (present-day Qandahar) in southern Afghanistan. The regions mentioned in the text are (1) Mesopotamia and Babylonia, (2) Apolloniatis, (3) Chalonitis, (4) Media, (5) Cambadena, (6) Upper Media, (7) Media Rhagiana, (8) Charena, (9) Comisena, (10) Hyrcania, (11) Astauena, (12) Parthyena, (13) Apauarticena, (14) Margiana, (15) Aria, (16) Anaua, (17) Zarangiana, (18) Sacastana, and (19) Arachosia. The author provides his readers with the names of each province as well as the names of supply stations and the distances between them. The descriptions of the provinces and stations in the western regions of the Parthian Empire are more detailed, while the accounts of the eastern regions are brief in the extreme and lack the names of stations and the precise distances between them. One of the most interesting details of the text is the reference to several cities in the northeastern and eastern regions of the Parthian Empire. The first city so mentioned is Asaac, in which the first Parthian monarch, Arsaces I*

(Arshak I), "was proclaimed king; and an everlasting fire" was "guarded there." There is no information on the exact location of this important city, and archaeologists have not been able to identify the site. Another city mentioned is Parthaunisa or Parthian Nisa, the city where the royal tombs of the Parthian monarchs were located. Finally, the author mentions the cities of Sacastana (the land of Sakas, Sistan), including Barda, Min, Palacenti, and Sigál, where the royal residence of the Sakas was located. The Sakas were part of the northern Iranian tribes, branches of which had pushed southward, settling in Sistan in present-day eastern Iran. As with the Parthian city of Asaac, the exact location of Sigál remains a mystery.

Through Mesopotamia and Babylonia: 171 Schoeni
Through Apolloniatis: 33 Schoeni
Through Chalonitis: 21 Schoeni
Through Media: 22 Schoeni
Through Cambadena: 31 Schoeni
Through Upper Media: 38 Schoeni
Through Media Rhagiana: 58 Schoeni
Through Choarena: 19 Schoeni
Through Comisena: 58 Schoeni
Through Hyrcania: 60 Schoeni
Through Astauena: 60 Schoeni
Through Parthyena: 25 Schoeni
Through Apauarticena: 27 Schoeni
Through Margiana: 30 Schoeni
Through Aria: 30 Schoeni
Through Anaua: 55 Schoeni
Through Zarangiana: 21 Schoeni
Through Sacastana: 63 Schoeni
Through Arachosia: 36 Schoeni
Total: 858 Schoeni
Mesopotamia and Babylonia

171 Schoeni

1. For those who cross the Euphrates, next to Zeugma is the city of Apamia, and then the village of Daeara. It is 3 schoeni distant from Apamia and the river Euphrates. Then Charax Sidae, called by the Greeks the city of Anthemusias, 5 schoeni: beyond which is Coraea, in Batana, a fortified place: 3 schoeni. To the right of this place is Mannuorrha Auyreth, a fortified place, and a well, from which the inhabitants get drinking water, 5 schoeni. Then Commisimbela, a fortified place: by which flows the river Bilecha, 4 schoeni. Then Alagma, a fortified place, a royal station, 3 schoeni; beyond which is Ichnae, a Greek city, founded by the Macedonians: it is situated on the

river Balicha: 3 schoeni. Then Nicephorium by the Euphrates, a Greek city, founded by King Alexander, 5 schoeni. Farther on, by the river, is Galabatha, a deserted village, 4 schoeni. Then the village of Chumbana, 1 schoenus; farther on Thillada Mirrhada, a royal station, 4 schoeni. Then a royal place, a temple of Artemis, founded by Darius, a small town; close by is the canal of Semiramis, and the Euphrates is dammed with rocks, in order that by being thus checked it may overflow the fields; but also in summer it wrecks the boats; to this place, 7 schoeni. Then Allan, a walled village, 4 schoeni. Then Phaliga, a village on the Euphrates (that means in Greek *half-way*), 6 schoeni. From Antioch to this place, 120 schoeni; and from thence to Seleucia, which is on the Tigris, 100 schoeni. Nearby Phaliga is the walled village of Nabagath, and by it flows the river Aburas, which empties into the Euphrates; there the legions cross over to the Roman territory beyond the river. Then the village of Asich, 4 schoeni; beyond which is the city of Dura Nicanoris, founded by the Macedonians, also called by the Greeks Europus, 6 schoeni. Then Merrha, a fortified place, a walled village, 5 schoeni. Then the city of Giddan, 5 schoeni. Then Belesi Biblada, 7 schoeni. Beyond is an island in the Euphrates, 6 schoeni; there was the treasure of Phraates, who cut the throats of his concubines, when Tiridates who was exiled, invaded [the land]. Then Anatho, an island in the Euphrates, of 4 stadia, on which is a city, 4 schoeni; beyond which is Thilabus, an island in the Euphrates; there is the treasure of the Parthians, 2 schoeni. Then Izan, a city on an island, 12 schoeni. Then Aipolis, [the city of Is] where there are bituminous springs, 16 schoeni. Beyond is the city of Besechana, in which is a temple of Atargatis, 12 schoeni. Then Neapolis by the Euphrates, 22 schoeni. From that place those leaving the Euphrates and passing through Narmalchan come to Seleucia on the Tigris, 9 schoeni. To this place [extend] Mesopotamia and Babylonia; and from Zeugma to Seleucia there are 171 schoeni.

2. From that place begins Apolloniatis, which extends 33 schoeni. It has villages, in which there are stations; and a Greek city, Artemita; through the midst of which flows the river Silla. To that place from Seleucia is 15 schoeni. But now the city is called Chalasar.

3. From that place, Chalonitis, 21 schoeni; in which there are 5 villages, in which there are stations, and a Greek city, Chala, 15 schoeni beyond Apolloniatis. Then, after 5 schoeni, a mountain which is called Zagrus [Zagros mountain range in western Iran], which forms the boundary between the district of Chalonitis and that of the Medes.

4. From that place, [Lower] Media, which extends 22 schoeni. The beginning is at the district of Carina; in which there are 5 villages in

which there are stations, but no city.

5. From that place, Cambadene, which extends 31 schoeni, in which there are 5 villages, in which there are stations, and a city, Bagistana [Bisotun near the present-day city of Kermanshah in western Iran], situated on a mountain; there is a statue and a pillar of Semiramis.

6. From that place, Upper Media, 38 schoeni; and at 3 schoeni from the very beginning of it is the city of Concobar [Kangavar in western Iran]; there is a temple of Artemis, 3 schoeni. Then Bazigraban, which is a custom house, 3 schoeni. Thence to Adrapana, the royal residence of those who ruled in Ecbatana [Hamedan], and which Tigranes the Armenian destroyed, 4 schoeni. Then Ecbatana, the metropolis of Media and the treasury, and a temple, sacred to Anaitis; they sacrifice there always; 12 schoeni. And beyond that place are 3 villages in which there are stations.

7. From that place [Rhagiana] Media, [58] schoeni. In it are 10 villages, and 5 cities. After 7 schoeni are Rhaga [Ray, south of modern-day Tehran] and Charax; of which Rhaga is the greatest of the cities in Media. And in Charax the first king Phraates settled the Mardi; it is beneath a mountain, which is called Caspius, beyond which are the Caspian Gates.

8. Beyond that place, for those passing through the Caspian Gates there is a narrow valley, and the district of Choarena [19 schoeni]; in which is the city of Apamia, after 4 schoeni; and there are 4 villages in which there are stations.

9. Beyond is Comisena, 58 schoeni, in which there are 8 villages in which there are stations, but there is no city.

10. Beyond is Hyrcania [present-day Gorgan in northern Iran], 60 schoeni, in which there are 11 villages in which there are stations.

11. Beyond is Astauena, 60 schoeni, in which there are 12 villages in which there are stations; and the city of Asaac, in which Arsaces was first proclaimed king; and an everlasting fire is guarded there.

12. Beyond is Parthyena, 25 schoeni; within which is a valley, and the city of Parthaunisa after 6 schoeni; there are royal tombs. But the Greeks call it Nisaea [Nisa in present-day southern Turkmenistan]. Then the city of Gathar after 6 schoeni. Then the city of Siroc after 5 schoeni. Of villages it has no more than one, which is called Saphri.

13. Beyond is Apauarcticena, 27 schoeni, in which is the city of

Apauarctica. Then the city of Ragau and two villages.

14. Beyond is Margiana [Marv or Merv, in present-day southeastern Turkmenistan], 30 schoeni. There is Antiochia, called *well-watered;* but there are no villages.

15. Beyond is Aria [Herat in present-day northwestern Afghanistan], 30 schoeni. There are the city of Candac and the city of Artacauan and Alexandria of the Arii; and 4 villages.

16. Beyond is Anauon, a region of Aria, 55 schoeni, in which is a very great city, Phra, and the city of Bis, and the city of Gari and the city of Nia; but there is no village.

17. Beyond is Zarangiana, 21 schoeni. There are the city of Parin and the city of Coroc.

18. Beyond is Sacastana [Sistan in present-day eastern Iran] of the Scythian Sacae, which is also Paraetacena, 63 schoeni. There are the city of Barda and the city of Min and the city of Palacenti and the city of Sigal; in that place is the royal residence of the Sacae; and nearby is the city of Alexandria (and nearby is the city of Alexandropolis), and 6 villages.

19. Beyond is Arachosia [corresponding with Qandahar in southern Afghanistan], 36 schoeni. And the Parthians call this White India; there are the city of Biyt and the city of Pharsana and the city of Chorochoad and the city of Demetrias; then Alexandropolis, the metropolis of Arachosia; it is Greek, and by it flows the river Arachotus. As far as this place the land is under the rule of the Parthians.

Source: Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations: An Account of the Overland Trade Route between the Levant and India in the First Century B.C.,* translated with commentary by Wilfred Harvey Schoff (Philadelphia: Commercial Museum, 1914).

28. PLUTARCH'S ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF CARRHAE BETWEEN THE ROMANS COMMANDED BY CRASSUS AND THE PARTHIANS COMMANDED BY SURENA (SUREN)

The Iranian sources on the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty (r. 247/238 BCE–224 CE) are scant in the extreme, forcing us to rely heavily on Roman and Greek accounts, which are resolute and unyielding in their hostility and disdain toward these eastern neighbors of Rome, portraying them as arrogant barbarians with strange and repugnant customs. This negative and debasing image was manufactured and promoted by the Romans, who were

adept producers of political propaganda against enemies who fought Rome's expansionist policies. One of the reasons for such a hostile attitude toward the Parthians was the defeats that the Roman armies had suffered at the hands of Parthian armies. One of the worst of these defeats was at Carrhae in present-day southeastern Turkey in 53 BCE. A large Roman army, commanded by the wealthy and ambitious Roman general Crassus, clashed with a much smaller Parthian force under the leadership of Surena (Suren), the leader of one of the most powerful families in the Parthian Empire. The excerpt below, written by the historian Plutarch, provides a detailed account of the Battle of Carrhae.

… For Crassus was then sixty years old, and he seemed older than he was. At his first coming, things went as he would have them, for he made a bridge over Euphrates without much difficulty, and passed over his army in safety, and occupied many cities of Mesopotamia, which yielded voluntarily. But a hundred of his men were killed in one, in which Apollonius was tyrant; therefore, bringing his forces against it, he took it by storm, plundered the goods, and sold the inhabitants. The Greeks call this city Zenodotia, upon the taking of which, he permitted the army to salute him Imperator, but this was very ill thought of, and it looked as if he despaired a nobler achievement, that he made so much of this little success. Putting garrisons of seven thousand foot and one thousand horse in the new conquests, he returned to take up his winter quarters in Syria, where his son was to meet him coming from Caesar out of Gaul, decorated with rewards for his valor, and bringing with him one thousand select horse. Here Crassus seemed to commit his first error, and except, indeed, the whole expedition, his greatest; for, whereas he ought to have gone forward and seized Babylon and Seleucia, cities that were ever at enmity with the Parthians, he gave the enemy time to provide against him. Besides, he spent his time in Syria more like a usurer than a general, not in taking an account of the arms, and in improving the skill and discipline of his soldiers, but in computing the revenue of the cities, wasting many days in weighing by scale and balance the treasure that was in the temple of Hierapolis, issuing requisitions for levies of soldiers upon particular towns and kingdoms, and then again withdrawing them on payment of sums of money, by which he lost his credit and became despised. Here, too, he met with the first ill-omen from that goddess, whom some call Venus, others Juno, others Nature, or the Cause that produces out of moisture the first principles and seeds of all things, and gives mankind their earliest knowledge of all that is good for them. For as they were going out of the temple, young Crassus stumbled, and his father fell upon him.

1. When he drew his army out of winter quarters, ambassadors came

to him from Arsaces, with this short speech: If the army was sent by the people of Rome, he denounced mortal war, but if, as he understood was the case, against the consent of his country, Crassus for his own private profit had invaded his territory, then their king would be more merciful, and taking pity upon Crassus's dotage, would send those soldiers back, who had been left not so truly to keep guard on him as to be his prisoners. Crassus boastfully told them he would return his answer at Seleucia, upon which Vagises, the eldest of them, laughed and showed the palm of his hand, saying, "Hair will grow here before you will see Seleucia;" so they returned to their king, Hyrodes, telling him it was war. Several of the Romans that were in garrison in Mesopotamia with great hazard made their escape, and brought word that the danger was worth consideration, urging their own eye-witness of the numbers of the enemy, and the manner of their fighting, when they assaulted their towns; and, as men's manner is, made all seem greater than really it was. By flight it was impossible to escape them, and as impossible to overtake them when they fled, and they had a new and strange sort of darts, as swift as sight, for they pierced whatever they met with, before you could see who threw; their men-at-arms were so provided that their weapons would cut through anything, and their armor give way to nothing. All which when the soldiers heard, their hearts failed them; for till now they thought there was no difference between the Parthians and the Armenians or Cappadocians, whom Lucullus grew weary with plundering, and had been persuaded that the main difficulty of the war consisted only in the tediousness of the march, and the trouble of chasing men that durst not come to blows, so that the danger of a battle was beyond their expectation; accordingly, some of the officers advised Crassus to proceed no further at present, but reconsider the whole enterprise, amongst whom in particular was Cassius, the quaestor. The soothsayers, also, told him privately the signs found in the sacrifices were continually adverse and unfavorable. But he paid no heed to them, or to anybody who gave any other advice than to proceed. Nor did Artabazes, king of Armenia, confirm him a little, who came to his aid with six thousand horse; who, however, were said to be only the king's life-guard and suite, for he promised ten thousand cuirassiers [cavalry soldiers wearing a cuirass or a piece of armor consisting of breastplate and backplate fastened together] more, and thirty thousand foot, at his own charge. He urged Crassus to invade Parthia by the way of Armenia, for not only would he be able there to supply his army with abundant provision, which he would give him, but his passage would be more secure in the mountains and hills, with which the whole country was covered, making it almost impassable to horse, in which the main strength of the Parthians

consisted. Crassus returned him but cold thanks for his readiness to serve him, and for the splendor of his assistance, and told him he was resolved to pass through Mesopotamia, where he had left a great many brave Roman soldiers; whereupon the Armenian went his way. As Crassus was taking the army over the river at Zeugma [a city on the left bank of Euphrates in present-day Turkey], he encountered preternaturally violent thunder, and the lightning flashed in the faces of the troops, and during the storm a hurricane broke upon the bridge, and carried part of it away; two thunderbolts fell upon the very place where the army was going to encamp; and one of the general's horses, magnificently caparisoned, dragged away the groom into the river and was drowned. It is said, too, that when they went to take up the first standard, the eagle of itself turned its head backward; and after he had passed over his army, as they were distributing provisions, the first thing they gave was lentils and salt, which with the Romans are the food proper to funerals, and are offered to the dead. And as Crassus was haranguing his soldiers, he let fall a word which was thought very ominous in the army; for "I am going," he said, "to break down the bridge, that none of you may return;" and whereas he ought, when he had perceived his blunder, to have corrected himself, and explained his meaning, seeing the men alarmed at the expression, he would not do it out of mere stubbornness. And when at the last general sacrifice the priest gave him the entrails, they slipped out of his hand, and when he saw the standers-by concerned at it, he laughed and said, "See what it is to be an old man; but I shall hold my sword fast enough."

So he marched his army along the river with seven legions, little less than four thousand horse, and as many light-armed soldiers, and the scouts returning declared that not one man appeared, but that they saw the footing of a great many horses which seemed to be retreating in flight, whereupon Crassus conceived great hopes, and the Romans began to despise the Parthians, as men that would not come to combat, hand to hand. But Cassius spoke with him again, and advised him to refresh his army in some of the garrison towns, and remain there till they could get some certain intelligence of the enemy, or at least to make toward Seleucia, and keep by the river, that so they might have the convenience of having provision constantly supplied by the boats, which might always accompany the army, and the river would secure them from being environed, and, if they should fight, it might be upon equal terms.

While Crassus was still considering, and as yet undetermined, there came to the camp an Arab chief named Ariamnes, a cunning and wily fellow, who, of all the evil chances which combined to lead them on to destruction, was the chief and the most fatal. Some of Pompey's old

soldiers knew him, and remembered him to have received some kindnesses of Pompey, and to have been looked upon as a friend to the Romans, but he was now suborned by the king's generals, and sent to Crassus to entice him if possible from the river and hills into the wide open plain, where he might be surrounded. For the Parthians desired anything, rather than to be obliged to meet the Romans face to face. He, therefore, coming to Crassus, (and he had a persuasive tongue,) highly commended Pompey as his benefactor, and admired the forces that Crassus had with him, but seemed to wonder why he delayed and made preparations, as if he should not use his feet more than any arms, against men that, taking with them their best goods and chattels, had designed long ago to fly for refuge to the Scythians or Hyrcanians. "If you meant to fight, you should have made all possible haste, before the king should recover courage, and collect his forces together; at present you see Surena and Sillaces opposed to you, to draw you off in pursuit of them, while the king himself keeps out of the way." But this was all a lie, for Hyrodes had divided his army in two parts, with one he in person wasted Armenia, revenging himself upon Artavasdes, and sent Surena against the Romans, not out of contempt, as some pretend, for there is no likelihood that he should despise Crassus, one of the chiefest men of Rome, to go and fight with Artavasdes, and invade Armenia; but much more probably he really apprehended the danger, and therefore waited to see the event, intending that Surena should first run the hazard of a battle, and draw the enemy on. Nor was this Surena an ordinary person, but in wealth, family, and reputation, the second man in the kingdom, and in courage and prowess the first, and for bodily stature and beauty no man like him. Whenever he traveled privately, he had one thousand camels to carry his baggage, two hundred chariots for his concubines, one thousand completely armed men for his life-guards, and a great many more light-armed; and he had at least ten thousand horsemen altogether, of his servants and retinue. The honor had long belonged to his family, that at the king's coronation he put the crown upon his head, and when this very king Hyrodes had been exiled, he brought him in; it was he, also, that took the great city of Seleucia, was the first man that scaled the walls, and with his own hand beat off the defenders. And though at this time he was not above thirty years old, he had a great name for wisdom and sagacity, and, indeed, by these qualities chiefly, he overthrew Crassus, who first through his overweening confidence, and afterwards because he was cowed by his calamities, fell a ready victim to his subtlety. When Ariamnes had thus worked upon him, he drew him from the river into vast plains, by a way that at first was pleasant and easy, but afterwards very troublesome by reason of the depth of the sand; no tree, nor any

water, and no end of this to be seen; so that they were not only spent with thirst, and the difficulty of the passage, but were dismayed with the uncomfortable prospect of not a bough, not a stream, not a hillock, not a green herb, but in fact a sea of sand, which encompassed the army with its waves. They began to suspect some treachery, and at the same time came messengers from Artavasdes, that he was fiercely attacked by Hyrodes, who had invaded his country, so that now it was impossible for him to send any succors, and that he therefore advised Crassus to turn back, and with joint forces to give Hyrodes battle, or at least that he should march and encamp where horses could not easily come, and keep to the mountains. Crassus, out of anger and perverseness, wrote him no answer, but told them, at present he was not at leisure to mind the Armenians, but he would call upon them another time, and revenge himself upon Artavasdes for his treachery. Cassius and his friends began again to complain, but when they perceived that it merely displeased Crassus, they gave over, but privately railed at the barbarian, "What evil genius, O thou worst of men, brought thee to our camp, and with what charms and potions hast thou bewitched Crassus, that he should march his army through a vast and deep desert, through ways which are rather fit for a captain of Arabian robbers, than for the general of a Roman army?" But the barbarian being a wily fellow, very submissively exhorted them, and encouraged them to sustain it a little further, and ran about the camp, and, professing to cheer up the soldiers, asked them, jokingly, "What, do you think you march through Campania, expecting everywhere to find springs, and shady trees, and baths, and inns of entertainment? Consider you now travel through the confines of Arabia and Assyria." Thus he managed them like children, and before the cheat was discovered, he rode away; not but that Crassus was aware of his going, but he had persuaded him that he would go and contrive how to disorder the affairs of the enemy.

It is related that Crassus came abroad that day not in his scarlet robe, which Roman generals usually wear, but in a black one, which, as soon as he perceived, he changed. And the standard-bearers had much ado to take up their eagles, which seemed to be fixed to the place. Crassus laughed at it, and hastened their march, and compelled his infantry to keep pace with his cavalry, till some few of the scouts returned and told them that their fellows were slain and they hardly escaped, that the enemy was at hand in full force, and resolved to give them battle. On this all was in an uproar; Crassus was struck with amazement, and for haste could scarcely put his army in good order. First, as Cassius advised, he opened their ranks and files that they might take up as much space as could be, to prevent their being surrounded, and distributed the horse upon the wings, but afterwards

changing his mind, he drew up his army in a square, and made a front every way, each of which consisted of twelve cohorts, to every one of which he allotted a troop of horse, that no part might be destitute of the assistance that the horse might give, and that they might be ready to assist everywhere, as need should require. Cassius commanded one of the wings, young Crassus the other, and he himself was in the middle. Thus they marched on till they came to a little river named Balissus, a very inconsiderable one in itself, but very grateful to the soldiers, who had suffered so much by drought and heat all along their march. Most of the commanders were of the opinion that they ought to remain there that night, and to inform themselves as much as possible of the number of the enemies, and their order, and so march against them at break of day; but Crassus was so carried away by the eagerness of his son, and the horsemen that were with him, who desired and urged him to lead them on and engage, that he commanded those that had a mind to it to eat and drink as they stood in their ranks, and before they had all well done, he led them on, not leisurely and with halts to take breath, as if he was going to battle, but kept on his pace as if he had been in haste, till they saw the enemy, contrary to their expectation, neither so many nor so magnificently armed as the Romans expected. For Surena had hid his main force behind the first ranks, and ordered them to hide the glittering of their armor with coats and skins. But when they approached and the general gave the signal, immediately all the field rung with a hideous noise and terrible clamor. For the Parthians do not encourage themselves to war with cornets and trumpets, but with a kind of kettle-drum, which they strike all at once in various quarters. With these they make a dead hollow noise like the bellowing of beasts, mixed with sounds resembling thunder, having, it would seem, very correctly observed, that of all our senses hearing most confounds and disorders us, and that the feelings excited through it most quickly disturb, and most entirely overpower the understanding.

When they had sufficiently terrified the Romans with their noise, they threw off the covering of their armor, and shone like lightning in their breastplates and helmets of polished Margianian steel, and with their horses covered with brass and steel trappings. Surena was the tallest and finest looking man himself, but the delicacy of his looks and effeminacy of his dress did not promise so much manhood as he really was master of; for his face was painted, and his hair parted after the fashion of the Medes, whereas the other Parthians made a more terrible appearance, with their shaggy hair gathered in a mass upon their foreheads after the Scythian mode. Their first design was with their lances to beat down and force back the first ranks of the Romans, but when they perceived the depth of their battle, and that the

soldiers firmly kept their ground, they made a retreat, and pretending to break their order and disperse, they encompassed the Roman square before they were aware of it. Crassus commanded his light-armed soldiers to charge, but they had not gone far before they were received with such a shower of arrows that they were glad to retire amongst the heavy-armed, with whom this was the first occasion of disorder and terror, when they perceived the strength and force of their darts, which pierced their arms, and passed through every kind of covering, hard and soft alike. The Parthians now placing themselves at distances began to shoot from all sides, not aiming at any particular mark, (for, indeed, the order of the Romans was so close, that they could not miss if they would,) but simply sent their arrows with great force out of strong bent bows, the strokes from which came with extreme violence. The position of the Romans was a very bad one from the first; for if they kept their ranks, they were wounded, and if they tried to charge, they hurt the enemy none the more, and themselves suffered none the less. For the Parthians threw their darts as they fled, an art in which none but the Scythians excel them, and it is, indeed, a cunning practice, for while they thus fight to make their escape, they avoid the dishonor of a flight.

However, the Romans had some comfort to think that when they had spent all their arrows, they would either give over or come to blows; but when they presently understood that there were numerous camels loaded with arrows, and that when the first ranks had discharged those they had, they wheeled off and took more, Crassus seeing no end of it, was out of all heart, and sent to his son that he should endeavor to fall in upon them before he was quite surrounded; for the enemy advanced most upon that quarter, and seemed to be trying to ride around and come upon the rear. Therefore the young man, taking with him thirteen hundred horse, one thousand of which he had from Caesar, five hundred archers, and eight cohorts of the full-armed soldiers that stood next him, led them up with design to charge the Parthians. Whether it was that they found themselves in a piece of marshy ground, as some think, or else designing to entice young Crassus as far as they could from his father, they turned and began to fly; whereupon he crying out that they durst not stand, pursued them, and with him Censorinus and Megabacchus, both famous, the latter for his courage and prowess, the other for being of a senator's family, and an excellent orator, both intimates of Crassus, and of about the same age. The horse thus pushing on, the infantry stayed little behind, being exalted with hopes and joy, for they supposed they had already conquered, and now were only pursuing; till when they were gone too far, they perceived the deceit, for they that seemed to fly, now turned again, and a great many fresh ones

came on. Upon this they made a halt, for they doubted not but now the enemy would attack them, because they were so few. But they merely placed their cuirassiers to face the Romans, and with the rest of their horse rode about scouring the field, and thus stirring up the sand, they raised such a dust that the Romans could neither see nor speak to one another, and being driven in upon one another in one close body, they were thus hit and killed, dying, not by a quick and easy death, but with miserable pains and convulsions; for writhing upon the darts in their bodies, they broke them in their wounds, and when they would by force pluck out the barbed points, they caught the nerves and veins, so that they tore and tortured themselves. Many of them died thus, and those that survived were disabled for any service, and when Publius exhorted them to charge the cuirassiers, they showed him their hands nailed to their shields, and their feet stuck to the ground, so that they could neither fly nor fight. He charged in himself boldly, however, with his horse, and came to close quarters with them, but was very unequal, whether as to the offensive or defensive part; for with his weak and little javelins, he struck against targets that were of tough raw hides and iron, whereas the lightly clad bodies of his Gaulish horsemen were exposed to the strong spears of the enemy. For upon these he mostly depended, and with them he wrought wonders; for they would catch hold of the great spears, and close upon the enemy, and so pull them off from their horses, where they could scarce stir by reason of the heaviness of their armor, and many of the Gauls quitting their own horses, would creep under those of the enemy, and stick them in the belly; which, growing unruly with the pain, trampled upon their riders and upon the enemies promiscuously. The Gauls were chiefly tormented by the heat and drought being not accustomed to either, and most of their horses were slain by being spurred on against the spears, so that they were forced to retire among the foot, bearing off Publius grievously wounded. Observing a sandy hillock not far off, they made to it, and tying their horses to one another, and placing them in the midst, and joining all their shields together before them, they thought they might make some defense against the barbarians. But it fell out quite contrary, for when they were drawn up in a plain, the front in some measure secured those that were behind; but when they were upon the hill, one being of necessity higher up than another, none were in shelter, but all alike stood equally exposed, bewailing their inglorious and useless fate. There were with Publius two Greeks that lived near there at Carrhae, Hieronymus and Nicomachus; these men urged him to retire with them and fly to Ichnae, a town not far from thence, and friendly to the Romans. “No,” said he, “there is no death so terrible, for the fear of which Publius would leave his friends that die upon his

account;" and bidding them to take care of themselves, he embraced them and sent them away, and, because he could not use his arm, for he was run through with a dart, he opened his side to his armor-bearer, and commanded him to run him through. It is said that Censorinus fell in the same manner. Megabacchus slew himself, as did also the rest of best note. The Parthians coming upon the rest with their lances, killed them fighting, nor were there above five hundred taken prisoners. Cutting off the head of Publius, they rode off directly towards Crassus. …

Source: Arthur Hugh Clough, ed., *Plutarch's Lives,* translated by John Dryden (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/674/pg674.html.

29. PARTHIA, ROME, AND ARMENIA: AN EXCERPT FROM TACITUS'S *ANNALS OF IMPERIAL ROME*

Vonones I (r. 8/9–12 CE) was a king of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty. He was the oldest son of the Arsacid monarch Phraates IV. Vonones's father had sent him, along with several of his brothers, as a hostage to the Roman emperor Augustus. After the death of Phraates IV, a civil war erupted among the various contenders to the Arsacid throne. To end the bloodshed, the Parthian nobility sent an embassy to Rome and requested that Vonones return to Parthia and assume the reins of power. Once Vonones returned home, however, the Parthian nobles began to doubt their decision when they realized that the prince had been infected with the ways and manners of the Roman enemy. They therefore decided to summon the Arsacid prince Artabanus. In his first attempt to seize the throne, Artabanus and his army were defeated. However, in their second encounter Artabanus defeated Vonones. Artabanus ascended the throne as Artabanus II (Ardavan II) in 10/11 CE at the Arsacid capital of Ctesiphon. The defeated Vonones fled to Armenia, where he proclaimed himself the king of the country. Artabanus II refused to accept Vonones as the new king of Armenia. The Roman emperor Tiberius also dispatched his adopted son, Germanicus, to Armenia. In the end, the Romans and the Parthians avoided another war and reached an agreement. The Romans, who had no more use for Vonones, deported the ill-fated Arsacid prince to Cilicia, where he died in 19 CE as he was planning his escape. The excerpt below from Annals of Imperial Rome, *written by the historian Tacitus, describes the roots of the controversy and conflict that erupted among the Parthians after the return of Vonones to Iran.*

In the consulship of Sisenna Statilius Taurus and Lucius Libo there was a commotion in the kingdoms and Roman provinces of the East. It had its origins among the Parthians, who disdained as a foreigner a king

whom they had sought and received from Rome, though he was of the family of the Arsacids. This was Vonones, who had been given as a hostage to Augustus by Phraates. For although he had driven before him armies and generals from Rome, Phraates had shown to Augustus every token of reverence and had sent him some of his children, to cement the friendship, not so much from dread of us [Romans] as from distrust of the loyalty of his countrymen.

After the death of Phraates, and the succeeding kings in the bloodshed of civil wars, there came to Rome envoys from the chief men of Parthia, in quest of Vonones, his eldest son. Caesar thought this a great honor to himself, and loaded Vonones with wealth. The barbarians, too, welcomed him with rejoicing, as is usual with new rulers. Soon they felt shame at Parthians having become degenerate, at their having sought a king from another world, one too infected with the training of the enemy, at the throne of the Arsacids now being possessed and given away among the provinces of Rome. "Where, they asked, was the glory of the men who slew Crassus, who drove out Antonius, if Caesar's drudge, after an endurance of so many years' slavery, were to rule over Parthians."

Vonones himself, too, further provoked their disdain, by his contrast with their ancestral manners, by his rare indulgence in the chase, by his feeble interest in horses, by the litter in which he was carried whenever he made a progress through their cities, and by his contemptuous dislike of their national festivities. They also ridiculed his Greek attendants and his keeping under seal the commonest household articles. But he was easy of approach; his courtesy was open to all, and thus virtues with which the Parthians were unfamiliar, and vices new to them. And as his ways were quite alien from theirs, they hated alike what was bad and what was good in him.

Accordingly, they summoned Artabanus, an Arsacid by blood, who had grown to manhood among the Dahae, and who, though routed in the first encounter, rallied his forces and possessed himself of the kingdom. The conquered Vonones found a refuge in Armenia, then a free country, and exposed to the power of Parthia and Rome, without being trusted by either. …

Source: Tacitus, *Annals of Tacitus,* Book II, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (London: Macmillan, 1876), 41–42.

30. PARTHIAN IDENTITY AND CUSTOMS: AN EXCERPT FROM TACITUS'S *ANNALS OF IMPERIAL ROME*

Scholars of ancient Iran have debated about how much historical knowledge the Arsacid (Parthian) and Sasanian dynasties possessed about their predecessors, particularly the Achaemenids. Did the Parthian and

Sasanian kings know about Cyrus II the Great, Darius I, etc.? And if they knew about them, what was or what were the sources of their knowledge? And how accurate was their understanding of the events that had transpired several centuries before they seized the reins of power? The short excerpt below from Tacitus's Annals of Imperial Rome *indicates that the Arsacid monarch Artabanus II was fully aware of the accomplishments of Cyrus II the Great and Alexander the Macedonian conqueror and of the boundaries of their empires.*

He [Artabanus II] was elated by the wars which he had successfully waged against surrounding nations, while he disdained the aged and, as he thought, unwarlike Tiberius, eagerly coveting Armenia, over which, on the death of Artaxias, he placed Arsaces, his eldest son. He further added insult, and sent envoys to reclaim the treasures left by Vonones in Syria and Cilicia. Then too he insisted on the ancient boundaries of Persia and Macedonia, and intimated, with a vainglorious threat, that he meant to seize on the country possessed by Cyrus and afterwards by Alexander.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals of Tacitus,* Book VI, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (London: Macmillan, 1876), 169.

31. THE FALL OF THE ARSACID (PARTHIAN) EMPIRE AND THE RISE OF THE SASANIAN DYNASTY IN CASSIUS DIO'S *ROMAN HISTORY*

The Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty came to a sudden end in 224 CE. The collapse of the Parthian state resulted not from a military defeat at the hands of a foreign power but instead from a rebellion staged by a Persian vassal based in Fars province in southern Iran. The last Arsacid monarch was Artabanus IV (Ardavan IV), who ruled from 213 to 224 CE. Artabanus IV was the son of the Arsacid king Vologeses V (r. 191/192–207/208 CE). After the death of Vologeses V, his oldest son ascended the Arsacid throne as Vologeses VI (r. 207/208–221/222 CE). Sometime after Vologeses had been proclaimed king, his younger brother, Artabanus, revolted and declared himself the legitimate heir to the Arsacid throne. The war between the two brothers dragged on for several years. The Romans took advantage of the civil war among the Parthian contenders to the throne to invade Mesopotamia.

Eventually, Artabanus defeated his brother and ascended the Arsacid throne. In 216 CE, the Roman emperor Caracalla (r. 211–217 CE) asked Artabanus IV for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Artabanus turned down Caracalla's request and refused to allow his daughter to marry the Roman emperor. Caracalla, who was obsessed with military glory, used the rebuff from Artabanus as a convenient pretext to invade Parthian territory.

Roman forces marched through northern Mesopotamia and captured the capital of the kingdom of Adiabene, the city of Arbela in present-day northern Iraq. The Romans could not, however, maintain their territorial gains and eventually withdrew without scoring a major military victory over Parthian forces. In response to Caracalla's invasion of Parthian territory, beginning in the spring of 217 Artabanus IV organized a military campaign aimed at reimposing Arsacid rule over Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, the situation in Rome had dramatically changed. Macrinus, the commander of the imperial guard who had become exasperated with the erratic Caracalla, assassinated him. Artabanus used the arrival of a new emperor in Rome to demand the withdrawal of all Roman forces from Mesopotamia and financial compensation for the destruction the Romans had brought about in their most recent campaign. When Macrinus rejected these demands, the war ensued once again. In 217 CE, Artabanus IV attacked northern Mesopotamia.

The decisive battle was fought at Nisibis in today's southeastern Turkey, where the Parthians scored an impressive victory. Shortly after this victory, however, Artabanus IV was challenged by Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr, a vassal kingdom in the province of Fars in present-day southern Iran. Ardashir was the son of Papak (Pabag). An inscription from the reign of Ardashir's son Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis identifies Papak as the father of Ardashir and identifies Sasan as the ancestor of the family. Sasan was the custodian of the temple of Anahid in Istakhr. Ardashir's grandmother was a member of a prominent noble family called Bazrangi. Using first the civil war between Vologeses VI and his younger brother Artabanus and then the wars between the Arsacids and the Romans, Ardashir expanded his territorial possessions from Fars into present-day southwestern Iran, seizing the province of Khuzestan. He also pushed eastward and seized Kerman in southeastern Iran. These conquests allowed Ardashir to declare himself an independent king. To demonstrate his independence, Ardashir minted his own coins. Artabanus IV seems initially not to have taken this challenge from a vassal very seriously. As Ardashir seized more territory and imposed his rule over neighboring kings, however, Artabanus IV had no choice but to respond.

In April 224 when the two armies joined battle, Ardashir defeated and killed Artabanus IV. With the death of Artabanus IV, Arsacid rule came to an abrupt end. After seizing the former provinces and vassal kingdoms of the Parthian Empire, Ardashir ascended the throne as the shahanshah *(king of kings) and the founder of the new Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE). The excerpt below from Cassius Dio's* Roman History *describes the collapse of the Parthian Empire and why the Romans were alarmed by the rise of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty.*

But the situation in Mesopotamia became still more alarming and

inspired a more genuine fear in all, not merely the people in Rome, but the rest of mankind as well. For Artaxerxes [Ardashir], a Persian, after conquering the Parthians in three battles and killing their king, Artabanus, made a campaign against Hatra, in the endeavour to capture it as a base for attacking the Romans. He actually did make a breach in the wall, but when he lost a good many soldiers through an ambuscade, he moved against Media. Of this country, as also of Parthia, he acquired no small portion, partly by force and partly by intimidation, and then marched against Armenia. … He accordingly became a source of fear to us [the Romans]; for he was encamped with a large army so as to threaten not only Mesopotamia but also Syria, and he boasted that he would win back everything that the ancient Persians had once held as far as the Grecian Sea, claiming that all this was his rightful inheritance from his forefathers [the Persian Achaemenid dynasty].

Source: Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History,* translated by Earnest Cary (London: William Heinemann, 1927), LXXX:23.2–4.

32. RISE OF THE SASANIAN DYNASTY UNDER ARDASHIR I AND THE ONSET OF THE PERSIAN-ROMAN WARS: AN EXCERPT FROM HERODIAN'S *HISTORY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*

After defeating and overthrowing the Arsacid dynasty in 224 CE, Ardashir I, founder of the Sasanian monarchy, ascended the throne as the shahanshah *(shah of shahs or king of kings). He quickly imposed his authority over the provinces of the former Parthian Empire. The local kings and governors who submitted voluntarily to his rule were allowed to retain their power, and those who refused were removed and replaced by a Sasanian prince. In 235 CE, Ardashir attacked and conquered the town of Carrhae in present-day southeastern Turkey. In 239/240 CE, he tried to seize the important trade center of Hatra in northern Iraq, which played a vital role in linking the economies of Mesopotamia to Asia Minor and Rome. The Romans responded by organizing a campaign to recapture Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Media in western Iran. Though initially successful, the Roman campaign proved to be disastrous. The excerpt below from Herodian's* History of the Roman Empire *describes how the Roman emperor Alexander Severus (r. 222–235 CE) attacked Persian territory from three directions and how Ardashir responded to the invasion of his empire by Roman armies.*

In the fourteenth year, however, expected dispatches from the governors of Syria and Mesopotamia revealed that Artaxerxes [Ardashir I], the Persian king had conquered the Parthians and had seized their Eastern empire, killing Artabanus, who was formerly

called the Great King and wore the double diadem. Artaxerxes then subdued all the barbarians on his borders and forced them to pay tribute. He did not remain quiet, however, or stay on his side of the Tigris River, but, after scaling its banks and crossing the borders of the Roman Empire, he overran Mesopotamia and threatened Syria. The entire continent opposite Europe, separated from it by the Aegean Sea and the Propontic Gulf, and the region called Asia he wished to recover for the Persian Empire. Believing these regions to be his by inheritance, he declared that all the countries in that area, including Ionia and Caria, have been ruled by Persian governors, beginning with Cyrus who first made the Median empire Persian, and ending with Darius, the last of the Persian monarchs, whose kingdom was seized by Alexander the Great. He asserted that it was therefore proper for him to recover for the Persians the kingdom which they had formerly possessed. When the Eastern governors revealed these developments in their dispatches, Alexander [Alexander Severus] was greatly disturbed by these unanticipated tidings, particularly since, raised from childhood in an age of peace, had spent his entire life in urban ease and comfort. Before doing anything else, he thought it best, after consulting his advisers, to send an embassy to the king and by his letters halt the invasion and disappoint the barbarian's hopes. In these letters he told Artaxerxes that he must remain within his own borders and not initiate any action; let him not, deluded by vain hopes, stir up a great war, but rather let each of them be content with what was already his. … But Artaxerxes ignored Alexander's effort; believing that the matter would be settled by arms, not by words, he took the field, pillaging and looting all the Roman provinces. He overran and plundered Mesopotamia, trampling it under the hoofs of his horses. He laid siege to the Roman garrison camps on the banks of the rivers, the camps which defended the empire. … The considerations which led him to wish for an expanded empire were not small. He was the first Persian to dare to launch an attack on the Parthian empire and the first to succeed in winning back that empire for the Persians. …

… After thus setting matters in order, Alexander considering that the huge army he had assembled was now nearly equal in power and numbers to the barbarians, consulted his advisers and then divided his force into three separate armies. One army he ordered to overrun the land of the Medes after marching north and passing through Armenia, which seemed to favor the Roman cause. He sent a second army to the eastern sector of the barbarian territory, where, it is said, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers at their confluence empty into very dense marshes; these are the only rivers whose mouth cannot be clearly determined. The third and most powerful army he kept himself, promising to lead it against the barbarians in the central sector. He

thought that in this way he would attack them from different directions when they were unprepared and not anticipating such strategy, and he believed that the Persian horde, constantly split up to face their attackers on several fronts, would be weaker and less unified for battle. The barbarians, it may be noted, do not hire mercenary soldiers as the Romans do, nor do they maintain trained standing armies. Rather, all the available men, and sometimes the women, too, mobilized at the king's orders. At the end of the war, each man returns to his regular occupation, taking as his pay whatever falls to his lot from the general booty. They use the bow and the horse in war, as the Romans do, but the barbarians are reared with these from childhood, and live by hunting; they never lay aside their quivers or dismount from their horses, but employ them constantly for war and the chase.

Alexander [Severus], therefore, devised what he believed to be the best possible plan of action, only to have Fortune defeat his design. The army sent through Armenia had an agonizing passage over the high, steep mountains of that country. … Then, plunging down into the land of the Medes, the Roman soldiers devastated the countryside, burning many villages and carrying off much loot. Informed of this, the Persian king led his army to the aid of the Medes, but met with little success in his efforts to halt the Roman advance. This is rough country; while it provided firm footing and easy passage for the infantry, the rugged mountain terrain hampered the movements of the barbarian cavalry and prevented their riding down the Romans or even making contact with them. Then men came and reported to the Persian king that another Roman army had appeared in eastern Parthia and was overrunning the plains there. Fearing that the Romans, after ravaging Parthia unopposed, might advance into Persia, Artaxerxes left behind a force which he thought strong enough to defend Media, and hurried with his entire army into the eastern sector. The Romans were advancing much too carelessly because they had met no opposition and, in addition, they believed that Alexander and his army, the largest and most formidable of the three, had already attacked the barbarians in the central sector. They thought too that their own advance would be easier and less hazardous when the barbarians were constantly being drawn off elsewhere to meet the threat of the emperor's army. All three Roman armies had been ordered to invade the enemy's territory, and a final rendezvous had been selected to which they were to bring their booty and prisoners. But Alexander failed them: he did not bring his army or come himself into barbarian territory either because he was afraid to risk his life for the Roman Empire or because his mother's feminine fears or excessive mother love restrained him. She blocked his efforts at courage by

persuading him that he should let others risk their lives for him, but that he should not personally fight in battle. It was this reluctance of his which led to the destruction of the advancing Roman army. The king attacked it unexpectedly with his entire force and trapped the Romans like fish in a net; firing their arrows from all sides at the encircled soldiers, the Persians massacred the whole army. The outnumbered Romans were unable to stem the attack of the Persian horde; they used their shields to protect those parts of their bodies exposed to the Persian arrows. Content merely to protect themselves, they offered no resistance. As a result, all the Romans were driven into one spot, where they made a wall of their shields and fought like an army under siege. Hit and wounded from every side, they held up bravely as long as they could, but in the end all were killed. The Romans suffered a staggering disaster; it is not easy to recall another like it, one in which a great army was destroyed, an army inferior in strength and determination to none of the armies of old. The successful outcome of these important events encouraged the Persian king to anticipate better things in the future.

Source: Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire: From the Death of Marcus Aurelius to the Accession of Gordian III,* Book 6, translated by Edward See Ecles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 3, 5. Reprinted with permission.

33. EXCERPT FROM *NAMEH-YE TANSAR* [LETTER OF TANSAR]

In 224 CE Ardashir, the governor of Istakhr in the province of Fars in southern Iran, defeated and killed Artabanus IV (Ardavan IV), the last monarch of the Arsacid dynasty, on the battlefield. The death of Artabanus signaled the end of Arsacid rule and the emergence of Ardashir as the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, which ruled until 651. Throughout their long reign the Sasanian monarchs tried to propagate the notion that the reason for the rebellion of Ardashir was partially the neglect that religion had suffered during the long reign of the Arsacids. This argument was revived during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE). Khosrow I unleashed a campaign of terror against the members of the Mazdakite movement who had demanded fundamental social and economic reforms. The document below is an excerpt from Nameh-ye Tansar [*Letter to Tansar*], *which may have been originally written in the 3rd century CE by the high priest* (herbed) *under Ardashir I to the ruler of Tabaristan, the lush and mountainous Caspian province of northern Iran. In this letter the high priest speaks of the neglect of religion by the Arsacids and the need to revive and support the religious establishment, which should serve as a close ally and supporter of the ruling monarchy. This letter was apparently reintroduced during the reign of Khosrow I as a tool of state propaganda against those who questioned*

the legitimacy of the Sasanian dynasty. In the 9th century, the Letter of Tansar *was translated from Persian into Arabic. Then in the 13th century, the letter was translated from Arabic into Persian by the author Ibn Esfandiyar, who included it in his* Tarikh-e Tabaristan [*History of Tabaristan*].

Long afterwards Ardashir son of Papak, son of Sasan, took the field. … Apart from Ardavan, the man of most might and dignity at the time was Gushnasp, king of Parishwar and Tabaristan. … When it became clear to Gushnasp that he could not avoid submitting and paying fealty, he wrote a letter to Tansar, chief herbad of Ardashir son of Papak. Tansar read the letter … and wrote the answer which follows: (2) (pp. 5–8) The chief herbad, Tansar has received a letter of Gushnasp, prince and king of Tabaristan and Parishwar. … He has studied each point, good or bad, and is pleased with it. … Do not marvel at my zeal and ardour for promoting order in the world, that the foundations of the laws of the faith may be made firm. For Church and State were born of the one womb, joined together and never to be sundered. … (3) (pp. 10–12) Now as to the question which you put concerning the decrees of the King of kings: … you wrote, 'although the king seeks the truth of the ancients yet he may be accused of forsaking tradition; and right though this may be for the world, it is not good for the faith.' … In the beginning of time men enjoyed perfect understanding of the knowledge of religion. … Yet it is not to be doubted that even then, through new happenings in their midst, they had need of a ruler of understanding; for till religion is interpreted by understanding it has no firm foundation. … (4) (pp. 16–17) You declared: 'There is much talk about the blood shed by the king and people are dismayed.' The answer is that there are many kings who have put few to death, yet have slain immoderately if they have killed but ten; and there are many who if they put men to death in their thousands should slay still more, being driven to it at the time by their people. … Punishments, you must know, are for three kinds of transgressions; first that of the creature against his God … when he turns from the faith and introduces a heresy into religion. … For (this) the King of kings has established a law far better than that of the ancients. For in former days any man who turned from the faith was swiftly … put to death. … The King of kings has ordered that such a man should be imprisoned and that for the space of a year learned men should summon him at frequent intervals and advise and lay arguments before him and destroy his doubt. If he becomes penitent and contrite and seek pardon of God, he is set free. If obstinacy and pride hold him back, then he is put to death. (5) (p. 22) Next for what you said, that the King of kings has taken away fires from the fire

temples, extinguished them and blotted them out, and that no one has ever before presumed so far against religion; know that the case is not so grievous but has been wrongly reported to you. The truth is that after Darius (III) each of the 'kings of the peoples' [i.e., the Parthians' vassal kings] built his own [dynastic] fire temple. This was pure innovation, introduced by them without the authority of kings of old. The King of kings has razed the temples, and confiscated the endowments, and had the fires carried back to their places of origin. … (6) (p. 26) Then you said: 'he has exacted money from men of wealth and merchants.' … The idea that the king of the day should seek help for the common people from the superfluity of the wealthy is a religious principle and clearly justified in reason. … (7) (pp. 42–3) The King of kings has cast the shadow of his majesty over all who have acknowledged his pre-eminence and service and have sent him tribute. … In the space of fourteen years … he thus brought it about that he made water flow in every desert and established towns and created groups of villages. … Good order in the affairs of the people affects him more than the welfare of his own body and soul. Whoever considers his achievements … will agree that since the power of the world's Creator arched this azure sphere the world has not known so through a king. (8) (pp. 38–9) So that when the world is abandoned by the King of kings … they will take up that prince [his heir] and seat him on the throne and place the crown on his head, and taking him by the hand will say: 'Do you accept the kingship from God? … according to the religion of Zardusht [Zoroaster], upheld by the King of kings, Gushtasp [= Vishtasp], son of Luhrasp, and restored by Ardashir son of Papak?' The king will accept that covenant.

Source: "Nameh-ye Tansar," in *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism,* edited and translated by Mary Boyce (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 109–111. Reprinted with permission.

34. INSCRIPTION OF THE ZOROASTRIAN HIGH PRIEST KARTIR AT NAQSH-E ROSTAM ON THE KA'BA-YE ZARDOSHT (KA'BA OF ZOROASTER)

Kartir (Kerdir) was a powerful Zoroastrian priest who lived during the reigns of the Sasanian kings Shapur I (r. 239/240/241/242–270/272 CE), Hormozd I (r. 270/272–273 CE), Bahram I (r. 273–276 CE), Bahram II (r. 276–293 CE), and Bahram III (r. 293 CE). He was also mentioned in the Paikuli inscription from the reign of Narseh (r. 293–302 CE). Kartir symbolized the growing influence and interference of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy in the political life of the Sasanian Empire. He organized the campaign to persecute the Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu communities of the Sasanian Empire. He also has been credited

for organizing the persecution of the Iranian prophet Mani (216–276 CE) and his followers. Kartir wrote proudly that "Jews and Buddhists and Brahmans and Aramaic and Greek-speaking Christians and baptizers and Manichaeans were assailed in the land," and "images were overthrown, and the dens of demons were (thus) destroyed," and fire temples were established in their place. Given his enormous power in religious and judicial spheres of the government, it is not surprising that he played an important role in the forced abdication of the young Sasanian monarch Bahram III, instead lending his support to Bahram's great-uncle, Narseh, who marched from Armenia to seize the Sasanian throne. Kartir's inscriptions were designed to portray the Zoroastrian high priest as a pious, dedicated, and ethical man who had devoted his life to the expansion and consolidation of Mazdaism in the Iranian and non-Iranian populated regions of the Sasanian Empire. They were also intended to portray the high priest as a man of god who had lived in accordance with the teachings of his religion. The inscription below, which was incised on the wall of Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (Ka'ba of Zoroaster) in Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis in the southern Iranian province of Fars, was composed during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Bahram II.

(1) And I, Kirder [Kartir] the Mobad have been acknowledged to be of good service and loyal to the yazads and to Shabuhr, King of kings. … Shabuhr, King of kings, made my position independent and authoritative over religious matters at court and in every province and place, and over the priesthood throughout the empire. (2) And at the command of Shabuhr, King of kings, and with the support of the yazads and the King of kings, religious services were multiplied in every province and place, and many Vahram Fires were founded. And many a priest became joyful and prosperous. And charters were sealed for many fires and priestly colleges, and much benefit reached Ohrmazd and the yazads, and there was much confusion for Ahriman and the devs. … (3) And the documents, charters and records which were then made under Shabuhr, King of kings … were written upon thus: 'Kirder the Herbad'. And after Shabuhr, King of kings, had departed to the Place of the Gods, and his son Ohrmazd, King of kings, was in the land, then Ohrmazd, King of kings, bestowed on me cap and girdle, and increased my dignity and honor … and I was styled 'Kirder the Mobad of Ohrmazd', in the name of Ohrmazd the Lord. … (4) And after Ohrmazd, King of kings, had departed to the Place of the Gods, and Vahram, King of kings, son of Shabuhr, King of kings … was in the land, then Vahram also, King of kings, advanced and honored me. … (5) And after Vahram, King of kings, son of Shabuhr had departed to the Place of the Gods, Vahram, King of kings, son of Vahram, was in the land, who in rule is generous and upright and

kind and beneficent and virtuous. And for love of Ohrmazd and the yazads, and for his own soul's sake, he increased my dignity and honour yet more. He gave me the dignity and honour of a nobleman; and … throughout the empire I was made more authoritative and independent than formerly over religious matters. And I was made Mobad and Judge of the whole empire, and I was made Master of Ceremonials and Warden of the Fires of Anahid-Ardashir and Anahid the Lady at Istakhr. (6) And I was styled 'Kirder by whom Vahram's soul is saved, Mobad of Ohrmazd'. And in every province and place of the whole empire the service of Ohrmazd and the yazads was exalted, and the Mazda-worshipping religion and its priests received much honour in the land. And the yazads, and water and fire and cattle, were greatly contented, and Ahriman and the devs was driven out of the land and deprived of credence. (7) And Jews and Buddhists and Brahmans, and Aramaic and Greek-speaking Christians and baptizers and Manicheans were assailed in the land. And images were overthrown, and the dens of demons were (thus) destroyed, and the places and abodes of the yazads [i.e., fire temples] were established. … (8) And from the first I, Kirder, underwent much toil and trouble for the yazads and the rulers, and for my own soul's sake. And I caused many fires and priestly colleges to flourish in Iran, and also in non-Iranian lands. There were fires and priests in the non-Iranian lands, which were reached by the armies of the King of kings. The provincial capital Antioch and the province of Syria, and the districts dependent on Syria; the provincial capital Tarsus and the province of Cilicia, and the districts dependent on Cilicia; the provincial capital Caesarea and the province Cappadocia, and the districts dependent on Cappadocia, up to Pontus and the province of Armenia, and Georgia and Albania and Balasagan, up to the 'Gate of the Alans'—these were plundered and burnt and laid waste by Shabuhr, King of kings, with his armies. There too, at the command of the king of kings, I reduced to order the priests and fires which were in those lands. And I did not allow harm to be done them, or captives made. And whoever had thus been made captive, him indeed I took and sent back to his own land. And I made the Mazda-worshipping religion and its good priests esteemed and honoured in the land. (9) And heretics and harmful men, who being in the priesthood did not in their expositions further the Mazda worshipping religion and the service of the yazads, them I punished and rebuked until through me they were amended. (10) And I drew up many documents and charters for fires and priestly colleges. And with the support of the yazads and the King of kings, and by my act, many Vahram Fires were founded in the land of Iran, and many next-of-kin marriages were made, and many people who had not believed, became believers. And there were many who had held the

religion of the devs, and by my act they abandoned the religion of the devs and accepted the religion of the yazads. (11) And many seasonal observances were held, and many religious accountings, in various ways, and other services for the yazads too were greatly increased and exalted which have not been written of in this inscription; for if they had been written of, then it would have been too much. And at my own cost I founded many Vahram Fires in different places. … And let whoever may see this record and read it aloud, be just and generous, even as I have been, for the sake of the yazads and rulers and his own soul, so that good fame and fortune may come to him in the flesh and blessedness attend his soul hereafter.

Source: Mary Boyce, ed. and trans., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 112–113. Reprinted with permission.

35. DESCRIPTIONS OF SHAPUR II AS A LEADER AND A DIPLOMAT

Shapur II (r. 309–379 CE) was the longest-reigning Sasanian monarch. He was designated as the king before he was born. For the first 16 years of his life, the daily affairs of the Sasanian state were managed by members of the Persian nobility and trusted courtiers. Shapur II began his long reign by organizing a campaign against Arab tribesmen who had invaded the southern and southwestern provinces of the Sasanian Empire. He then shifted his attention from the southern borders of his empire to Central Asia, where a Hunnic people called the Chionites were threatening the northeastern provinces of the Sasanian state. After several military campaigns between 353 and 358 CE, Shapur pacified the Chionites and formed an alliance with their king.

Much of Shapur II's reign was spent in wars against the Romans. His principal objective was to nullify the Peace of Nisibis, which the Sasanian monarch Narseh had signed with the Romans in 297/298, changing the border between the Roman and Persian Empires from the Euphrates River to the Tigris River and allowing the Romans to restore their power in Armenia. Shapur II was determined to regain the five provinces that Narseh had lost to the Romans.

In military campaigns extending from 337 to 363, Persian and Roman armies repeatedly clashed over the control of Mesopotamia and Armenia. The Persians managed to capture the Roman outposts of Sinjara (Sinjar) in present-day northern Iraq and Amida (present-day Diyarbakir) in southeastern Turkey. The Romans struck back in 363 CE. The Roman emperor Julian marched toward Mesopotamia. Despite initial military victories against the Persians, Julian received a mortal wound in the Battle of Samara (present-day Iraq) that killed him three days later. Julian's successor, Jovian (r. 363–364 CE), signed a peace treaty that returned to

Shapur the five provinces that the Sasanian monarch Narseh had lost.

The excerpts below highlight the accomplishments of Shapur II, his wars with the Romans, and his public appearance at the head of the Sasanian armies. Shapur's two inscriptions on a doorpost in the ruins of the Achaemenid royal complex, Persepolis, in southern Iran contain a number of important facts. For example, in the second inscription, a reference is made to the judge of the cities of Javed Shapur and Kabul, which indicates that the area of Kabul in present-day Afghanistan was under Sasanian rule at this time. The location of a city called Javed Shapur is uncertain.

Shapur II Fights the Roman Emperors Julian and Jovian

… [A]round high noon, the Persians, marshaled en masse unexpectedly fell upon those in the rear of the Roman army. Although they were at the time in disarray and were confounded by the sudden assault, they still met it gamely, the Emperor making his accustomed rounds and arousing the legions to courageous action. (29) When all had come to close quarters, he met his brigadiers and tribunes and mingled with his soldiery. In the very heat of the battle he was struck by a sword, placed on a shield, and carried aloft to his tent. He lasted until midnight and then died, having nearly reduced the Persian power to utter destruction.

Meanwhile, the Emperor's death being kept a secret, a Roman army had conquered to such an extent that fifty of the most powerful satraps fell, in addition to a countless host of ordinary Persians. However, when the Emperor's death became known the majority of the Romans withdrew to the tent where the corpse lay, although some continued to fight and conquer the enemy. … (30) Jovian, having put on the purple and assumed the diadem, held fast to the march homeward. When he had come to the fortress of Suma the Persian cavalry attacked his men. Quite a few elephants were brought in and molested the right wing, on which were stationed the Jovians and Herculians. (These are names of legions established by Diocletian and Maximian. …)

… The Romans then advanced for four days, harassed on all sides by the foe, who pursued whenever they saw the Romans on the move and fled whenever the Romans stood their ground against them. Having opened up some space apart from them the Romans decided to cross the Tigris. Accordingly they tied together bottles, through which they had somehow strung bands, and riding upon these they made the crossing. After they had gained the opposite bank, then their leaders also in addition to the rest passed over safely. Yet not even so did the Persians withdraw but along every piece of the way kept threatening them with a large number of men. The Romans were in constant danger, oppressed both by the ills that ring them and by their lack of

provisions besides.

31. Although this was the army's condition, the Persians still were making overtures concerning peace, having dispatched the Surenas and others of those who held authority among them. Jovian received their talk of peace favorably and sent Salustius the Pretorian prefect together with Arintheus to confer on the matter. A bilateral thirty-year treaty was concluded whereby the Romans agreed to cede to the Persians the nation of the Zabdiceni, as well as the Cardueni, the Rhemeni, and the Zalini, plus all the forts (fifteen in number) around these, with their inhabitants, properties, animals, and all paraphernalia; and to hand over Nisibis, but without its inhabitants. … The Persians took over besides the greater part of Armenia, allowing the Romans to keep only a little bit of it. On these terms a treaty was made and was ratified by both parties' written instruments. The Romans were granted a visa to journey back home in such fashion that, doing no damage inside the Persians' territory, they in turn were set upon by no Persian ambusdade.

Source: Zosimius, *Historia Nova: The Decline of Rome,* Book 3, translated by James J. Buchanan and Harold T. Davis (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), 26–33. Reprinted with permission.

Sasanian Military Uniforms and Arms

1:11 Leaving this place as well, the whole army had come to a district called Maranga, when near daybreak a huge force of Persians appeared with Merena, general of their cavalry, two sons of the king, and many other magnates. 12. Moreover, all the companies were clad in iron, and all parts of their bodies were covered with thick plates, so fitted that the stiff joints conformed with those of their limbs; and the forms of human faces were so skillfully fitted to their heads, that, since their entire bodies were covered with metal, arrows that fell upon them could lodge only where they could see a little through tiny openings opposite the pupil of the eye, or where through the tips of their noses they were able to get a little breath. 13. Of these some, who were armed with pikes, stood so motionless that you would think them held fast by clamps of bronze. Hard by, the archers (for that nation has especially trusted in this art from the very cradle) were bending their flexible bows with such wide-stretched arms that the strings touched their right breasts, while the arrow-points were close to their left hands; and by a highly skilful stroke of the fingers the arrows flew hissing forth and brought with them deadly wounds. 14. Behind them the gleaming elephants, with their awful figures and savage, gaping mouths could scarcely be endured by the faint-hearted; and their trumpeting, their odour, and their strange aspect alarmed

the horses still more. 15. Seated upon these, their drivers had long-handled knives bound to their right hands, remembering the disaster suffered at Nisibis; for if the strength of the driver proved no match for the excited brute, and he turned upon his own people (as happened then) and crushed masses of them to the ground, they could with a mighty stroke cut through the vein where the head is separated from the neck. …

Source: *Ammianus Marcellinus,* Vol. 1, Book 29, *1, 1–5, A.D. 359,* translated by John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

Inscription of Shapur II at Persepolis (I)

In the month of Spandarmad, in the second year of the Mazda worshipping lord Shapur, King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran, who is a scion of the Gods (311 A.D.). At that time, when Shapur the Saka king, of Sind, Seistan and Turan, up to the edge of the sea, son of the Mazda worshipping lord Ohrmazd King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran, who was a scion of the Gods, departed (bore homage) from the court of His Majesty, he went on this road, between Istakhr and Seistan and graciously came (here) to Persepolis. Then he had lunch in this building. With him were Vahram son of Nahv Ohrmazd, the Seistan councilor, Narseh the magus, of the Varāz (family), Vēn son of Rēv Mithra, satrap of Zarang, Narseh the scribe, and other Persian and Saka knights, people of Zarang, messenger(s) from the provinces, and chiefs. He caused great rejoicing, and ordered rites performed for the Gods. He gave blessings to his father and ancestors. Then he offered blessings to Shapur the King of Kings, to his own soul, and also to him who built this structure. May God remember (them?).

Source: Richard N. Frye, "The Persepolis Middle Persian Inscription from the Time of Shapur II," *Acta Orientalia* 30 (1966): 83–95.

Inscription of Shapur II at Persepolis (II)

(It is) in the month of Tir of the year 18 on the day of Ohrmazd, that I Seleucus, the judge of Javedshapur and Kabul have come to Persepolis. This inscription, written above, which Shapur the Saka king ordered engraved; was ordered by me to be examined. Then I gave a blessing, namely, that Shapur, the King of Kings, be the best of men, immortal and with eternal rule. And that Shapur the Saka king live long and always perform acts which seem good to the Gods and to Shapur the King of Kings. That I also (the slave) do that which to the Gods and to His Majesty Shapur the King of Kings may appear pious. And from here may I arrive in safety to the court of His Majesty (Pl.), and may I see His Majesty (Sing.) Shapur the King of Kings in piety

and health. And may I return in piety (and) health to Kabul.

Source: Richard N. Frye, "The Persepolis Middle Persian Inscription from the Time of Shapur II," *Acta Orientalia* 30 (1966): 83–95.

Shapur II and Emperor Constantius

5.1. … [T]he king of Persia was still encamped in the confines of the frontier tribes; and having now made a treaty of alliance with the Chionitae and Gelani, the fiercest warriors of all, he was on the point of returning to his own territories, when he received Tamsapor's letter, stating that the Roman emperor begged and entreated for peace. 2. Therefore, imagining that such a step would not be attempted unless the fabric of the empire were weakened, he swelled with still greater pride, embraced the name of peace, and proposed hard conditions; and dispatching one Narseus with gifts as his envoy, he sent a letter to Constantius, in no wise deviating from his native haughtiness, the tenor of which, as we have learned, was as follows: 3. "I Sapor [Shapur], King of Kings, partner with the Stars, brother of the Sun and Moon, to my brother Constantius Caesar offer most ample greeting.

"I rejoice and at last take pleasure that you have returned to the best course and acknowledged the inviolable sanction of justice, having learned from actual experience what havoc has been caused at various times by obstinate covetousness of what belongs to others. 4. Since therefore the consideration of truth ought to be free and untrammeled, and it befits those in high station to speak as they feel, I shall state my proposal in brief terms, recalling that what I am about to say I have often repeated. 5. That my forefathers' empire reached as far as the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia even your own ancient records bear witness; these lands it is fitting that I should demand, since (and may what I say not seem arrogant) I surpass the kings of old in magnificence and array of conspicuous virtues. But at all times right reason is dear to me, and trained in it from my earliest youth, I have never allowed myself to do anything for which I had cause to repent. And therefore it is my duty to recover Armenia with Mesopotamia, which double-dealing wrested from my grandfather. That principle shall never be brought to acceptance among us which you exultantly maintain, that without any distinction between virtue and deceit all successful events of war should be approved. 7. Finally, if you wish to follow my sound advice, disregard this small tract, always a source of woe and bloodshed, so that you may rule the rest in security, wisely recalling that even expert physicians sometimes cauterize, lance, and even cut away some parts of the body, in order to save the rest sound for use; and that even wild beasts do this: for

when they observe for what possession they are being relentlessly hunted, they give that up of their own accord, so as afterwards to live free from fear. 8. This assuredly I declare, that if this embassy of mine returns unsuccessful, after the time of the winter rest is past I shall gird myself with all my strength and with fortune and the justice of my terms upholding my hope of a successful issue, I shall hasten to come on, so far as reason permits."

9. After this letter had long been pondered, answer was made with upright heart, as they say, and circumspectly, as follows:—

10. "I, Constantius, victor by land and sea, perpetual Augustus, to my brother King Sapor, offer most ample greeting.

"I rejoice in your health, and if you will, I shall be your friend hereafter; but this covetousness of yours, always unbending and more widely encroaching, I vehemently reprobate. 11. You demand Mesopotamia as your own and likewise Armenia, and you recommend lopping off some members of a sound body, so that its health may afterwards be put upon a firm footing—advice which is rather to be refuted than to be confirmed by any agreement. Therefore listen to the truth, not obscured by any juggling but transparent and not to be intimidated by any empty threats. 12. My praetorian prefect, thinking to undertake an enterprise conducing to the public weal, entered into conversations with a general of yours, through the agency of some individuals of little worth and without consulting me, on the subject of peace. This we neither reject nor refuse, if only it take place with dignity and honour, without at all prejudicing our self-respect or our majesty. 13. For at this time, when the sequence of events (may envious ears be placated!) has beamed in manifold form upon us, when with the overthrow of the usurpers the whole Roman world is subject to us, it is absurd and silly to surrender what we long preserved unmolested when we were still confined within the bounds of the Orient. 14. Furthermore, pray make an end of those intimidations which (as usual) are directed against us, since there can be no doubt that it was not through slackness, but through self-restraint that we have sometimes accepted battle rather than offered it, and that when we are set upon, we defend our territories with the most valiant spirit of a good conscience; for we know both by experience and by reading that while in some battles, though rarely, the Roman cause has stumbled, yet in the main issue of our wars it has never succumbed to defeat."

15. This embassy having been sent back without obtaining anything—for no fuller answer could be made to the king's unbridled greed—after a very few days it was followed by Count Prosper, Spectatus,

tribune and secretary, and likewise, at the suggestion of Musonianus, the philosopher Eustathius, as a master of persuasion; they carried with them letters of the emperor and gifts, and meanwhile planned by some craft or other to stay Sapor's preparations, so that his northern provinces might not be fortified beyond the possibility of attack.

Source: *Ammianus Marcellinus,* Vol. 1, *XVII, 5, 1–4, XVII, 5, 13–15, A.D. 358,* translated by John C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

36. THE REIGN OF KHOSROW ANUSHIRAVAN (531–579 CE): EXCERPTS FROM *THE HISTORY OF TABARI*

The excerpt below from The History of Tabari *describes the life and accomplishments of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan, who ruled from 531 to 579 CE. The empire that Khosrow I inherited from his father, Kavad I, had been shaken by social revolt from within and humiliating defeat at the hands of invading nomadic groups from without. A major revolt led by the popular religious leader Mazdak demanded fundamental reforms in the existing social and economic institutions of the empire. The Sasanian state had also been humiliated by the Hephthalites, a nomadic group from Central Asia who defeated Sasanian armies and killed Khosrow's grandfather, the Sasanian monarch Peroz. As a charismatic leader who was committed to governmental reforms, Khosrow adopted a carrot-and-stick approach. He crushed the Mazdakite movement and defeated the Hephthalites with support from the Western Turk state in Central Asia. At the same time, he introduced badly needed reforms that addressed the grievances of the empire's subject classes, particularly the peasantry. The first excerpt below is from the multivolume* History of Tabari, *which recounts the challenges and accomplishments of Khosrow I. Writing in Arabic, Tabari uses the Arabic form of Khosrow's name, which was Kisra.*

Then there assumed the royal power Kisrā Anūsharwān, son of Qubādh [Kavad], son of Fayrūz [Peroz], son of Yazdajird [Yazdegerd] (II), son of Bahrām (V) Jūr. When he became king, he wrote letters to the four Fādhūsbāns, each of whom was governor over a region of the land of Persia, and to their subordinate officials. The text of his letter to the Fādhūsbān of Azerbaijan is as follows:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, from the King Kisrā, son of Qubādh, to Wārī, son of the Nakhīrjān, Fādhūsbān of Azerbaijan and Armenia and their territories, and Dunbāwand and Tabaristān and their adjacent territories, and his subordinate officials, greetings! The thing that most strikes fear into the hearts of people is the feeling of deprivation felt by those who fear the ending of their state of comfortable living, the eruption of civil disorders, and the

advent of unpleasant things to the best of individuals, one after the other of such individuals, in regard to their own persons, their retainers, their personal wealth, or what is dearest to them. We know of no cause for fear or absence of a thing that brings more crushing ill-fortune for the generality of people, nor one likely to bring about universal disaster, than the absence of a righteous king.

When Kisrā had gained firm control of power, he took measures to extirpate the religious beliefs of a hypocritical person from the people of Fasā, called Zarādhusht, son of Khurrakān, a new faith which he had brought into existence within the Mazdaean religion. A considerable number of people followed him in that heretical innovation, and his movement became prominent on account of this. Among those who carried out missionary work for him among the masses was a certain man … called Mazdaq, son of Bamdādh. Among the things he ordained for people, made attractive to them, and urged them to adopt, was holding their possessions and their families in common. He proclaimed that all this was part of the piety that is pleasing to God, and that he will reward with the most handsome of recompenses, and that, if that religious faith he commanded them to observe and urged them to adopt were not to exist, the truly good way of behavior, the one which is pleasing to God, would lie in the common sharing of property. With those doctrines, he incited the lower classes against the upper classes. Through him, all sorts of vile persons became mixed up with the best elements of society, criminals seeking to despoil them of their possessions found easy ways to do this, tyrannical persons had their paths to tyranny facilitated, and fornicators were able to indulge their lusts and get their hands on high-born women to whom they would never have been able to aspire. Universal calamity overwhelmed the people to an extent they had never before experienced.

Hence Kisrā forbade the people to act in accordance with any of the heretical innovations of Zarādusht, son of Kharrakān, and Mazdaq, son of Bamdādh. He extirpated all their heresy, and he killed a great number of their … adherents and did not allow himself to be deflected from any of what he had forbidden the people. [He further killed] a group of the Manichaeans, and made firm for the Magians the religion they had always held.

Before Kisrā became king, the office of Isbahbadh—that is, the supreme commander of the armed forces—was held by one man, who was responsible for this supreme command over all the land. Kisrā now divided this office and rank between four Isbahbadhs, namely, the Isbahbadh of the East, comprising Khurāsān and its adjoining regions; the Isbahbadh of the West; the Isbahbadh of Nīmrūz, that is, the land of Yemen; and the Isbahbadh of Azerbaijan and its adjoining

regions, that is, the Khazar lands. He saw in this new arrangement a way of improving the good ordering of his kingdom. He strengthened the fighting quality of the soldiers with weapons and mounts. He recovered lands belonging to the kingdom of Persia, some of which had slipped out of the hand of King Qubādh and into the control of other monarchs of the nations, through various causes and reasons, including Sind, Bust, al-Rukhkhaj, Zabulistān, Tukhāristān, Daridstān, and Kābulistan. He inflicted extensive slaughter among a people called the Bāriz, transported the remaining ones of them from their land, and resettled them in various places of his kingdom. They submitted to him as his servants, and he utilized them in his military campaigns. He gave orders for another people, called the Sūl, to be made captives, and they were brought before him. He commanded that they should be killed, except for eighty of their boldest warriors, whom he spared and had settled at Shahrām Fayrūz, where he could call upon them for his military campaigns. There was also a people called the Abkhaz, and other ones of the Balanjar, and al-Lān, who came together in a coalition to raid his lands. They made an incursion into Armenia in order to raid and despoil its people. Their route thither was at that moment easy and unimpeded, and Kisrā closed his eyes to their activities until, when they had firmly established themselves in his territories, he dispatched against them contingents of troops, who fought with them, and exterminated them apart for ten thousand of them, whom they took prisoner and then settled in Azerbaijan and the neighboring regions.

King Fayrūz had previously erected in the regions of the Sūl and al-Lān buildings of stone, with the intention of strengthening his lands against the encroachments there of those nations. Moreover, King Qubādh, son of Fayrūz, had begun the construction, after his father, of a great number of building works in those regions, until, when Kisrā achieved the royal power, he gave orders for the construction in the region of the Sūl, with stone hewn in the vicinity of Jurjān, of towns, castles, fortified mounds, and many other buildings, which would serve as a protection for the people of his lands, where they might seek refuge from the enemy in the event of a sudden attack.

The Khāqān Sinjibū was the most implacable, the most courageous, the most powerful, and the most plentifully endowed with troops of all the Turks. It was he who attacked … the king of the Hephthalites, showing no fear of the numerousness or the fierce fighting qualities of the Hephthalites, and then killed their king and the greater part of his troops, seizing their possessions as plunder and occupying their lands, with the exception of the part of them that Kisrā had conquered. Khāqān won over the Abkhaz and the Balanjar to his side, and they vouchsafed him their obedience. They informed him that the kings of

Persia had always sought to ward them off by paying tribute, thereby securing safety from their raids on their (sc., the Persians') lands. Khāqān now advanced with 110,000 warriors until he reached the fringes of the land of the Sūl. He sent a message to Kisrā, uttering threats and using peremptory language against him, to the effect that Kisrā must send to him treasure and to the Abkhaz and the Balanjar the tribute money the Persian kings had customarily paid before Kisrā came to power. [He further threatened] that, if Kisrā did not expedite the forwarding of all that he asked, he would enter his land and attack it. Kisrā paid no heed to his menaces and did not offer Khāqān a single item of what he had demanded, since he had strongly fortified the region of the gates of the Sūl and had blocked the ways and the tracks through defiles that the Khāqān Sinjibū would have to follow in order to reach him. He also knew the strength of his defensive forces in the frontier region of Armenia: five thousand warriors, cavalrymen, and infantry. The Khāqān Sinjibū got word of Kisrā's fortifying of the frontier regions of the Sūl, hence returned to his own land with all his troops and with his intentions frustrated. Those of the enemy who were massed against Jurjān were likewise, because of the fortifications Kisrā had built in its neighborhood, unable to mount any raids on it and to conquer it.

The people had recognized Kisrā Anūsharwān's excellent judgment, knowledge, intelligence, bravery, and resolution, combined with his mildness and clemency toward them. When he was crowned, the great men of state and the nobles came into his presence, and with all their might and eloquence called down blessings on his head. When they had concluded their speeches, he stood up and delivered an oration. He began by mentioning God's favors on His people when He had created them, and his own dependency on God for regulating their affairs and the provision of foodstuffs and the means of life for them. He left nothing [which ought to have been said] out of his oration. Then he told the people what they had suffered [through the spreading of Mazdak's teachings]; namely, the loss of their possessions, the destruction of their religion and the damage to their position regarding their children and their means of life. He further informed them that he was looking into ways and means of putting all that right and rendering affairs strong again, and urged the people to aid him in this.

Next, he ordered the heads of the leaders of the Mazdakites to be chopped off and their possessions to be shared out among the poor and needy. He killed a large number of those people who had confiscated other people's possessions, and restored these possessions to their original owners. He commanded that every child concerning whom there was dispute before him about his or her origin should be

attributed to that person in whose family the child was, when the real father was not known, and that the child should be given a [legal] share in the estate of the man to whom the child was now attributed, provided that the latter acknowledged the child. In regard to every woman who had been forced to give herself unwillingly to a man, that man was to be held to account and compelled to pay the bride price to her so that her family was thereby satisfied. Then the woman was to be given the choice between remaining with him or marrying someone else, except that if she had an original husband, she was to be restored to him. He further commanded that every man who had caused harm to another person in regard to his possessions, or who had committed an act of oppression against another person, should make full restitution and then be punished in a manner appropriate to the enormity of his offense. He decreed that, where those responsible for the upbringing of the children of leading families had died, he himself would be responsible for them. He married the girls among them to their social equals and provided them with their bridal outfit and necessities out of the state treasury; and he gave the youths in marriage to wives from noble families, presented them with money for dowries, awarded them sufficient riches, and ordained that they should be members of his court so that he might call upon them for filling various of his state offices. He gave the wives of his [dead] father the choice between staying with his own wives and sharing in their maintenance and provision, and enjoying the same income as these last, or alternatively, he would seek out for them husbands of the same social standing as themselves.

He further ordained the digging of canals and the excavation of subterranean irrigation conduits … and provision of loans for the owners of agricultural lands and support for them. He likewise ordered the rebuilding of every wooden bridge or bridge of boats … that had been destroyed and of every masonry bridge … that had been smashed, and further ordered that every village that had fallen into ruin should be restored to a better state of prosperity than previously. He made enquiries about the cavalrymen of the army … , and those lacking in resources he brought up to standard by allocating to them horses and equipment, and earmarked for them adequate financial allowances. He assigned overseers for the fire temples and provided good roads for the people. Along the highways he built castles and towers. He selected [good] administrators, tax officials, and governors, and gave the persons appointed to these functions stringent orders. He set himself to peruse the conduct, the writings, and the legal decisions of Ardashīr, and took them as a model to imitate, urging the people to do likewise.

Once he had a firm grip on the royal power and all the lands were

under his control, and some years after he had been reigning, he marched against Antioch, where were stationed leading commanders of Qaysar's army, and conquered it. He then gave orders that a plan should be made for him of the city of Antioch exactly to scale (literally, "according to its extent"), with the number of its houses, streets, and everything contained in it, and orders that a [new city] should be built for him exactly like Antioch but situated at the side of al-Madā'in. The city known as al-Rūmiyyah was built exactly on the plan of Antioch. He thereupon had the inhabitants of Antioch transported and settled in the new city; when they entered the city's gate, the denizens of each house went to the new house so exactly resembling their former one in Antioch that it was as if they had never left the city. Kisrā now attacked the town of Heraclea and conquered it, followed by Alexandria and the lands extending up to it. He left behind a detachment of his troops in the land of the Romans after Qaysar had submitted to him and paid him ransom money.

He returned home from Rūm and then took the field against the Khazars, and sought revenge on them for the damage they had wrought on him by afflicting his subjects. Next, he turned his attention to Aden. He blocked up part of the sea there which lay between two mountains and is adjacent to the land of Abyssinia (al-Habashah), with large ships, rocks, iron columns, and chains, and he killed the great men of state of that land. He then returned to al-Madā'in, having brought under his control all those regions of the land of Rūm and Armenia that are situated on this side of Heraclea plus the whole area between his capital and the sea, in the region of Aden. He appointed al-Mundhir b. al-Nu'mān as king over the Arabs and loaded him with honors. Then he took up residence in his own kingdom at al-Madā'in, and turned his attention once more to affairs needing his personal care. After this, he led an expedition against the Hephthalites, seeking revenge for his grandfather Fayrūz. Previously, Anūsharwān had married Khāqān's daughter, so he now wrote to him before setting off on the expedition, informing him of his intentions and enjoining him to march against the Hephthalites. Anūsharwān came up against them, killed their king, and extirpated the whole of his family. He penetrated to Balkh and what lies beyond it and quartered his troops in Farghānah. He then returned home from Khurāsān. When he got back to al-Madā'in, a deputation came to him seeking help against the Abyssinians. So he sent back with them one of his commanders heading an army of the men of Daylam and adjacent regions; they killed the Abyssinian Masrūq in Yemen and remained there.

Thus Kisrā enjoyed an unbroken run of victories and conquests; all the nations were in awe of him; and numerous delegations from the

Turks, the Chinese, the Khazars, and similar [distant] nations thronged his court. He lavished generosity on scholars. He reigned for forty-eight years. The birth of the Prophet [Muhammad] fell within the latter part of Anūsharwān's reign.

Source: *The History of Prophets and Kings* [Tarikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk] by Abū Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (839–923), rendered as *The History of al-Tabari,* translated and annotated by C. E. Bosworth (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 146–161. Reprinted with permission.

37. SUPERPOWER DIPLOMACY ON THE SILK ROAD: SOGDIAN MERCHANTS AND THE SASANIAN, BYZANTINE, AND TURK EMPIRES IN MENANDER'S *HISTORY OF MENANDER THE GUARDSMAN*

In a series of campaigns from 560 to 563 CE, the Persian Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan (r. 531–579 CE) defeated the Hephthalites with support from the Western Turk Empire, which imposed its rule over much of Central Asia. Although the two empires had collaborated on destroying their common enemy, the Western Turks and the Sasanians were soon locked in a battle over control of the silk trade. The Sogdian merchants who controlled the lucrative silk trade and were now ruled by the Western Turks had requested from the Persian king of kings the right to sell and distribute their silk within the Sasanian domains. Khosrow I, who viewed the Sogdian merchants as spies working for the Western Turk emperor, turned down the request and insisted on retaining full control over the sale of silk within the boundaries of his empire. The conflict over the control of the silk trade convinced the Western Turks to seek an alliance with the Byzantine Empire, which was the principal nemesis of the Sasanian state to the west. The Sogdian merchant who led a delegation to Byzantium in 568/569 proposed the idea of bypassing Persian territory and exporting the silk from Central Asia to the Byzantine capital through the Caucasus. The Byzantine emperor reciprocated and sent an embassy to the ruler of the Western Turks. The Greek ambassador Zemarkhos (Zemarchus) was received by the Turk emperor with great pomp and ceremony in silk tents. The abundance of silver and gold among these "barbarians" astonished the Byzantine envoy, who agreed to a treaty of alliance. The alliance between the Byzantine Empire and the Western Turk Empire lasted for 10 years until the death of the Turk emperor, Silziboulos (Sizabul or Dizabul).

10

1. (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 7)

At the beginning of the fourth year of Justin's reign an embassy [late 568–early 569] from the Turks came to Byzantium. As the power of the Turks increased, the Soghdians, who were earlier subjects of the Ephthalites and now of the Turks, asked their king to send an embassy to the Persians, to request that the Soghdians be allowed to travel there and sell raw silk to the Medes [Persians]. Sizabul agreed and dispatched Soghdian envoys, whose leader was Maniakh. When they reached the king of the Persians, they asked that they be given permission to sell the raw silk there without any hindrance. The Persian king, who was not at all pleased by their request, being reluctant to grant free access from there to that area of Persia, put off his reply until the next day and kept postponing it. After a series of postponements, as the Soghdians were pressing insistently for a reply, Khosro [the Sasanian king] summoned a council to discuss the matter. Katulph, the Ephthalite, … [a]dvised the Persian king not to return the silk, but to buy it, paying the fair price for it, and to burn it in the fire before the very eyes of the envoys, so that he would not be held to have committed an injustice but that it would be clear that he did not wish to use raw silk from the Turks. So the silk was burned, and the Soghdians returned to their homeland not at all pleased with what had happened.

When the Soghdians told Sizabul what had occurred, he himself sent another embassy to the Persians, since he wished to establish friendly relations between them and his own state. When this second Turkish embassy arrived, the king, after discussion with the Persian high officials and with Katulph, decided that because of the untrustworthy nature of the Scythians it was completely against Persian interest to establish friendly relations with the Turks. At this he ordered that some of the envoys be poisoned, so that henceforth they would refuse to come there. The majority of the Turkish envoys, all but three or four, were murdered by a deadly poison mixed in with their food. A report was circulated amongst the Persians that the Turkish envoys had been killed by the stifling dryness of Persia, because their own land was often covered with snow and they could not survive away from cold weather. Although the survivors of the plot suspected a different explanation, when they returned to their own country they noised about the same version as the Persians. Sizabul [the Turk emperor], however, who was a shrewd and intelligent man, recognized what had been done and realized the truth, that the envoys had been killed by treachery. This was the cause of the hostility between the Persians and the Turks.

Maniakh, the leader of the Soghdians, took this opportunity and advised Sizabul that it would be better for the Turks to cultivate the friendship of the Romans and send their raw silk for sale to them

because they made more use of it than other people. Maniakh said that he himself was very willing to go along with envoys from the Turks, and in his way the Romans and Turks would become friends. Sizabul consented to this proposal and sent Maniakh and some others as envoys to the Roman Emperor carrying greetings, a valuable gift of raw silk and a letter. …

Carrying this letter Maniakh set out on his journey. He travelled very many roads and traversed very many lands, over huge mountains reaching near the clouds, through plains and woods, over marshes and rivers. Then he crossed the Caucasus and finally came to Byzantium. When he entered the palace and came before the Emperor, he did everything according to the law of friendship. He handed over the letter and the gifts to those who were sent to receive them and he asked that the toil of his journey not to be in vain.

When the Emperor read the letter, written in Scythian, through an interpreter, he most willingly granted an audience to the embassy. He then questioned the envoys about the leadership of the Turks and their location. They replied that they had four principalities, but power over the whole people was vested in Sizabul alone. Furthermore, they said, the Turks had conquered the Ephthalites and made them tributary. "You have, therefore," asked the Emperor, "made all the power of Ephthalites subject to you?" "Completely," replied the envoys. The Emperor then asked, "Do the Ephthalites live in cities or villages?" The envoys: "My Lord, that people lives in cities." "Then," said the Emperor, "it is clear that you have become master of these cities." "Indeed," said the envoys. … In this way the Turkish people became friends of the Romans and established these relations with our state.

2. (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 7)

When the Turks, who had formerly been called the Sacae, sent an embassy to Justin [Byzantine Emperor] concerning peace, the Emperor decided to send an envoy to the Turks. He ordered Zemarchus the Cilician, who was at the time general in command of the eastern cities, to make ready for this. …

(*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 8)

… When Zemarchus and his companions reached the place where Sizabul was presently staying—in a valley of the so-called 'Golden Mountain'—, having arrived there, they were summoned and immediately came into Sizabul's presence. He was in a tent, sitting upon a golden throne with two wheels, which could be drawn when necessary by one horse. They greeted the barbarian and offered him

their gifts, as was the custom, and were received by those whose task it was. …

When they were on the march and encamped in a place called Talas, an envoy from the Persians came to meet Sizabul. He invited the Roman and the Persian ambassadors to dine with him. When they arrived, Sizabul treated the Romans with greater esteem and had them recline on the more honourable couch. Moreover, he made many complaints against the Persians, saying that he had suffered wrongs at their hands and on this account was going to war against them. While Sizabul was vehemently making his accusations, the Persian envoy ignored the custom of silence which prevailed amongst them at their feasts and began rapidly to argue back, bravely refuting Sizabul's charges, and those present were astounded at the measure of his rage, since he abandoned custom and used many intemperate expressions. Under these circumstances they departed, and Sizabul prepared his attack on Persia.

After this he summoned Zemarchus and his companions, reaffirmed the friendship that existed toward the Romans, and sent them away on their journey home.

Source: Menander, *The History of Menander the Guardsman: Fragment 10.1–10.4,* introductory essay, text, translation, and historiographical notes by R. C. Blockley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns Publications, 1985). Reprinted with permission.

38. BAHRAM CHOBIN: AN EXCERPT FROM *THE HISTORY OF THEOPHYLACT SIMOCATTA*

Bahram Chobin or Chubin was an army commander in the Sasanian army during the reign of the Sasanian king of kings Hormozd IV (r. 579–590 CE). Bahram's father, Bahram Goshnasp, hailed from the powerful Mehran family, which was based in Ray, south of modern-day Tehran. Because Bahram was slim and tall, he was nicknamed Chobin, meaning "Wooden Shaft" or "Javelin-like." In his Shahnameh [*The Book of Kings*], *the Persian poet Ferdowsi described Bahram as a tall and swarthy warrior with black frizzy hair. Ferdowsi also praised the Sasanian general as a highly skilled horseback rider. Bahram had served as an army commander during the Sasanian–Byzantine wars after 572 CE and rose through the ranks to command the army of the north, which incorporated Azerbaijan and Media. In 588 CE, when Hephthalite hordes from Central Asia, backed by the Western Turk state, invaded the northeastern regions of the Sasanian state, Bahram was appointed commander of the Sasanian army. He marched against the nomadic invaders and defeated them in Tokharestan (present-day northern Afghanistan), capturing the important city of Balkh. The victorious Persian army then crossed the Oxus River (Amu Darya) into Transoxiana, the region lying between the Oxus and*

Jaxartes Rivers, and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Turk army, killing the Turk khaqan.

The impressive victories of Bahram aroused the jealousy of the Sasanian monarch, Hormozd IV, who appointed his capable and gifted general to the difficult task of conquering the kingdom of Lazica. Lazica was situated on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, corresponding with the western region of the present-day Republic of Georgia. The king of Lazica ruled as a vassal of the Byzantine emperor, who viewed the province as an important geographical barrier, one that denied the Persians access to the Black Sea. Despite his usual display of courage and bravery, Bahram suffered a defeat at the hands of a Byzantine army. This setback provided Hormozd IV with the convenient justification to dismiss his charismatic commander from his post. Humiliated by the king's decision, Bahram rose in rebellion against Hormozd, who had become increasingly unpopular among the ruling elite. Having raised a large army, Bahram marched against the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon, near modern-day Baghdad in present-day southern Iraq. As Bahram moved against Ctesiphon, the Persian nobility, led by two of the king's brothers-in-law, staged a palace coup. Hormozd IV was detained, blinded, and subsequently executed. The conspirators placed Hormozd's oldest son, Khosrow, on the throne. Khosrow II had secretly played a prominent role in the conspiracy hatched by his two uncles to overthrow his father. The new king and his supporters sent an army against Bahram. Bahram, however, defeated Khosrow's army, with many officers defecting to his side. He then resumed his march against Ctesiphon. As Bahram's army approached the Sasanian capital, the new king, Khosrow, and his supporters fled the city. They intended to travel to Azerbaijan, but before reaching their destination they were intercepted and defeated by Bahram. Having survived the defeat at the hands of Bahram, Khosrow fled west into Byzantine territory, seeking support from the emperor Maurice, who agreed to provide him with financial and military assistance in return for significant territorial concessions. Meanwhile, after defeating Khosrow and his army, Bahram marched to Ctesiphon and seized the Sasanian capital in 590 CE and ascended the throne of Iran as the shahanshah *(king of kings). He denounced Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, as an upstart and a usurper, the son of a shepherd who should have never been allowed to seize the throne of Iran. Bahram also called for the restoration of the Arsacid dynasty, which had been overthrown in 224 CE.*

Bahram's dream of resurrecting the Arsacid state did not materialize, however, and his reign proved to be short-lived. The defeated Khosrow returned to Iran with a large army of Byzantine mercenaries. He received further assistance from army units organized by his supporters in Armenia. Bahram rushed to Azerbaijan to confront Khosrow but was defeated after a three-day battle near Lake Orumiyeh in present-day northwestern Iran.

Bahram's family, including his wives and children, were captured by Khosrow. With the Sasanian capital also falling into the hands of Khosrow, Bahram had no alternative but to flee east into Transoxiana and seek refuge in the Turk territory north of the Oxus River. Even as he fled, the armies of the powerful Karen family, based in Shahr-i Qumis near modern-day Damghan in northern Iran, attempted to block his escape route. Despite these difficulties, Bahram reached the territory of the Turk state. The khaqan *of the Turks appointed him a commander in his army. Khosrow II, who was frightened by Bahram's popularity and reappearance, arranged for his assassination. The historian Tabari claimed that the assassination was carried out through distribution of gifts and bribes among the members of the Turk royal family, particularly the queen. After his death at the hands of an assassin, Bahram joined the ranks of Iran's legendary heroes. He was celebrated in Persian literature as a fearless and valiant warrior, a compassionate and just ruler, and a shrewd and gifted tactician. His fame and popularity survived the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651 CE and the arrival of Islam. In the ninth century CE, when the Persian Samanids founded a new empire in Central Asia and northeastern Iran, they claimed direct descent from Bahram Chobin. The excerpt below taken from* The History of Theophylact Simocatta *provides a brief description of Bahram, his family, and the causes for the conflict between the Iranian general and the Sasanian king Hormozd IV.*

(4) Now I have recorded in the earlier passages the subsequent actions of Romans and Persians. Therefore I must return to the continuity of the narrative, wheeling round the history, which is perhaps running a little off course, towards its subsequent and easily perceptible goal, from which in fact we briefly disgressed after presenting in public the attendant events connected with Baram [Bahram] at that time. (5) But first let Baram's fatherland and lineage, the stages of his fortune, and his progressive achievements be described in a few words, so that the historical recital may be in all respects harmonious and comprehensive.

(6) I heard a certain Babylonian, a sacred official who had gained very great experience in the composition of royal epistles, say that Baram originated from the region whose name is Rhazakene [Ragha or Ray south of modern Tehran], but that this Persian tyrant, who had initiated the overthrow of the tyrant Hormisdas [Hormozd IV], belonged to the house of Mirrames [Mehran/Mihran]. (7) For seven peoples among the Medes, allocated by ancient law, perform the sagacious and most honoured of their actions; and he stated that procedures could not be otherwise; (8) and they say that the people entitled Arsacid hold the kingship and these place the diadem on the king, another is in charge of the military disposition, another is

invested with the cares of state, (9) another resolves the differences of those who have some dispute and need an arbitrator, the fifth commands the cavalry, the next levies taxes on the subjects and is overseer of the royal treasuries, the seventh is appointed custodian of arms and military uniform; Darius [Darius I of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty] the son of Hydaspes inscribed this very law in the royal precincts.

(10) They say that Baram, who came from the house of Mirrames and the Arsacid people, was formerly enrolled among the bodyguards of the king, that shortly afterwards, as commander of a unit of soldiers, he joined in campaign with Chosroes [Khosrow I Anushiravan, who ruled 531–579] the son of Kabades [Kavad, the father of Khosrow I], when the Babylonians reduced Daras while Justin the younger possessed charge of the Roman empire. (11) And so Baram, together with the Persian king Chosroes the elder, invaded as far as Armenia itself, distinguished himself in the campaign, and soon after was even appointed general of the Persian company. (12) When fortune had thus gradually raised him up, so that he was even proclaimed *darigbedum* of the royal hearth (whom Romans indeed name *curopalates*), he continued into extreme folly: he was inflated greatly and uncontrollably as a result of his victories against the Turks, and felt the pangs of the embryo of tyranny. (13) And so like a spark in the ashes he concealed the motive for his grievance from Hormisdas the king, but whipped up the multitude by deceitfully contriving to make it appear indeed that the Persian king was angry against his army and had in addition even threatened death on the Babylonian soldiers because of their misfortunes in the engagement in Susiana. (14) He also produced forged edicts of Hormisdas which curtailed the customary distributions to the contingents from the royal treausaries. And hence the whole multitude was infuriated and proceeded to mutinous insubordination.

Source: *The History of Theophylact Simocatta,* translated by Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), iii:18.4–18.14. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix

Dynasties of Pre-Islamic Greater Iran

1. MYTHOLOGICAL/PREHISTORIC DYNASTIES

Pishdadian

Gayomard (Kayumars)
Siyamak
Hoshang/Hushang
Tahmures
Jamshid
Zahhak
Fereydun
Iraj
Manuchehr
Nowzar
Zab/Zav
Garshasp

Kayanian (Rulers of Eastern Iran)

Kay Qobad
Kay Kavus
Kay Khosrow
Kay Lohrasp
Kay Goshtasp (patron of the prophet Zarathushtra/Zoroaster)
Kay Bahman
Kay Dara

2. THE MEDES (700–549 BCE)

Deioces (700–675 BCE or 700–647 BCE)
Phraortes (Fravartaish) (674–653 BCE or 647–625 BCE)
Cyaxares (Huvakhshtra) (625/624–585 BCE)
Astyages (Rishti Vega) (585/584–550 BCE)

3. THE ACHAEMENIDS (559–330 BCE)

Cyrus II the Great (Kurush) (559/558–530 BCE)
Cambyses II (Kambujiya) (530–522 BCE)
Bardiya/Gaumata (522 BCE)
Darius I (Daryavaush) (522–486 BCE)
Xerxes I (Xshayarsha) (486–465 BCE)
Artaxerxes I (Artaxshacha) (465–424 BCE)
Xerxes II (424–423 BCE)
Sogdianos (424–423 BCE)
Darius II (423–404 BCE)
Artaxerxes II (404–359 BCE)
Artaxerxes III (359–338 BCE)
Arses (Artaxerxes IV) (338–336 BCE)
Darius III (336–330 BCE)

4. THE SELEUCIDS (305–125 BCE)

Seleucus I Nicator (305–281 BCE)
Antiochus I Soter (281–261 BCE)
Antiochus II Theos (261–246 BCE)
Seleucus II Callinicus (246–225 BCE)
Seleucus III Soter (225–223 BCE)
Antiochus III the Great (223–187 BCE)
Seleucus IV Philopator (187–175 BCE)
Antiochus IV Ephiphanes (175–164 BCE)
Antiochus V Eupator (164–162 BCE)
Demetrius I Soter (162–150 BCE)
Alexander Balas (150–145 BCE)
Demetrius II Nicator (145–141 BCE)
Antiochus VI Epiphanes (145–142 BCE)
Antiochus VII Sidetes (138–129 BCE)
Demetrius II Nicator (129–125 BCE)

5. THE ARSACIDS (PARTHIANS) (247/238 BCE–224 CE)

Arsaces I (Arshak I) (247/238–217 BCE)
Arsaces II (217–191 BCE)
Phriapatius (191–176 BCE)
Phraates I (Frahata I) (176–171 BCE)
Mithridates I (Mithradata I) (171–139/138 BCE)
Phraates II (139/138–128 BCE)
Artabanus I (Ardavan I) (128–124/123 BCE)
Mithridates II (124/123–88/87 BCE)
Gotarzes I (Godarz I) (91/90–81/80 BCE)

Orodes I (Urud I) (81/80–76/75 BCE)
Sinatruces (78/77–71/70 BCE)
Phraates III (71/70–58/57 BCE)
Mithridates III (58/57 BCE)
Orodes II (58/57–38 BCE)
Phraates IV (38–3/2 BCE)
Phraates V (2 BCE–2 CE)
Vonones I (8/9 CE)
Artabanus II (10/11–38 CE)
Vardanes (Bardan) (38–45 CE)
Gotarzes II (43/44–51 CE)
Vonones II (51 CE)
Vologeses I (Valakhsh I) (51–76/80 CE)
Vologeses II (77/78 CE)
Artabanus III (79–81 CE)
Pacorus (77/78–108/109 CE)
Osroes (108/109–127/128 CE)
Vologeses III (111/112–147/148 CE)
Vologeses IV (147/148–191/192 CE)
Vologeses V (191/192–207/208 CE)
Vologeses VI (207/208–221/222 CE)
Artabanus IV (213–224 CE)

6. THE KINGS OF CHARACENE

Hyspaosines (127–122/121 BCE)
Apodacus (110/109–104/103 BCE)
Tiraius I (95/94–90/89 BCE)
Tiraius II (79/78–49/48 BCE)
Artabazus (49/48–48/47 BCE)
Attambelus I (47/46–25/24 BCE)
Theonesius I (19/18 BCE)
Attambelus II (17/16 BCE–8/9 CE)
Abinergaus (10/11 CE, 22/23 CE)
Orobazes I (19 CE)
Attambelus III (37/38–44/45 CE)
Theonesius II (46/47 CE)
Theonesius III (52/53 CE)
Attambelus IV (54/55–64/65 CE)
Attambelus V (64/65–73/74 CE)
Orobazes I (73–80 CE)
Pacorus (II) (80–101/102 CE)
Attambelus VI (101/102–105/106 CE)
Theonesius IV (110/111–112/113 CE)
Attambelus VII (113/114–117 CE)

Meredates (131–150/151 CE)
Orabazes II (150/151–165 CE)
Abinergaus II (165–180 CE)
Attambelus VIII (180–195 CE)
Maga (195–210 CE)
Abinergaus III (210–222 CE)

7. THE KINGS OF ELYMAIS

Kamnaskires I Soter (147 BCE)
Kamnaskires II Nicephorus (145–139 BCE)
Okkonapses (139 BCE)
Tigraios (138/137–133/132 BCE)
Kamnaskires III (82/81–75 BCE)
Kamnaskires IV (62/61 or 59/58–56/55 BCE)
Kamnaskires V and successors (36/35 BCE)
Orodes I (second half of first century CE)
Phraates (end of first century CE and beginning of second century CE)
Orodes II (first half of second century CE)
Kamnaskires-Orodes III (second half of second century CE)
Osroes (?) (second century CE)

Source: Josef Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia,* translated by Azizeh Azodi (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 318.

8. THE KINGS OF PERSIS

Baydad (end of third century and beginning of second century BCE)
Ardashir I (first half of second century BCE)
Vahbarz (first half of second century BCE)
Vadfradad I (mid-second century BCE)
Vadfradad II (ca. 140)
Unknown king (second half of second century BCE)
Darev I (end of second century BCE)
Vadfradad III (first half of first century BCE)
Darev II (first century CE)
Ardashir II (second half of first century CE)
Vahshir (second half of first century CE)
Pakor I (first half of first century CE)
Pakor II (first half of first century CE)
Nambed (mid-first century CE)
Napad (second half of first century CE)
Unknown king III (end of first century CE)
Vadfradad IV (first half of second century CE)
Manchihr I (first half of second century CE)

Ardashir III (first half of second century CE)
Manchihr II (mid-second century CE)
Unknown king (second half of second century CE)
Manchihr III (second half of second century CE)
Ardashir IV (end of second century CE)
Shapur (beginning of third century CE)

Source: Joseph Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia.* Translated by Azizeh Azodi. London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 319.

9. THE SASANIANS (224–651 CE)

Ardashir I (224–239/240/241/242 CE)
Shapur I (239/240/241/242–270/272 CE)
Hormozd I (270/272–273 CE)
Bahram I (273–276 CE)
Bahram II (276–293 CE)
Bahram III (293 CE)
Narseh (293–302 CE)
Hormozd II (302–309 CE)
Shapur II (309–379 CE)
Ardashir II (379–383 CE)
Shapur III (383–388 CE)
Bahram IV (388–399 CE)
Yazdegerd I (399–421 CE)
Bahram V Gor (421–439 CE)
Yazdegerd II (439–457 CE)
Hormozd III (457–459 CE)
Peroz (459–484 CE)
Balash (Valakhsh) (484–488 CE)
Kavad I (488–496 CE)
Jamasp/Zamasp (496–498 CE)
Kavad I (499–531 CE)
Khosrow I Anushiravan (531–579 CE)
Hormozd IV (579–590 CE)
Bahram VI Chobin (590–591 CE)
Khosrow II Parvez (590–628 CE)
Kavad II Shiruya (628 CE)
Ardashir III (628–630 CE)
Shahrbaraz (630 CE)
Khosrow III (630 CE)
Boran (Puran) (630–631 CE)
Azarmidokht (631 CE)
Hormozd V (631–632 CE)
Khosrow IV (631–633 CE)

Yazdegerd III (633–651 CE)

10. THE KUSHANO-SASANIANS (233–370 CE)

Ardashir I Kushanshah (233–246 CE)
Ardashir II Kushanshah (233–246 CE)
Peroz I Kushanshah (246–285 CE)
Hormozd I Kushanshah (285–300 CE)
Hormozd II Kushanshah (300/302–309 CE)
Peroz II Kushanshah (309–335 CE)
Bahram (335–360/370 CE)

Glossary of Selected Terms

āb: Water.

***abākhtar spahbad* (*spahbed*):** Chief of the army of the north, a position created during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan.

ābān: Waters, plural of Ab (Water), the name of a Zoroastrian month (Month of Waters).

Abānagān: A Zoroastrian feast dedicated to veneration of waters.

Ābān Niyāyesh: Zoroastrian hymn to water.

Ābān Yasht: The hymn in the *Avesta* dedicated to waters but in fact to the deity of water, Aredvi Sura Anahita.

Abarkāvān: Name of the present-day Iranian island of Qeshm during the Sasanian era.

Abar Shahr (Nēv Shapur): A district as well as a city in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan.

***abarvez* (*parvez*):** Victorious, the title of the Sasanian king of kings Khosrow II.

Abna: Descendants of the Persians in Yemen.

Achaemenes: According to Darius I, the ancestor of the Achaemenid royal house whose name appears as Hakhamanish in Old Persian.

Achaemenids: The Iranian dynasty founded by Cyrus II the Great (r. 559/558–530 BCE), which ruled from 550 to 330 BCE.

adur: Fire (New Persian: *azar*).

Adur Borzen Mihr (New Persian: Azar Borzin Mehr): Fire of Borzen Mihr, one of the three sacred fires of Sasanian Iran, designated as the fire of the third estate or the laboring classes, which included peasant farmers and artisans.

Adur Farnbag (New Persian: Azar Farnbagh): Fire of Farnbag, one of the three sacred fires of Sasanian Iran designated as the fire of the first estate, or the priests.

Adur Gushnasp (New Persian: Azar-e Goshnasp): Fire of Gushnasp, one of the three sacred fires of Sasanian Iran designated as the fire of warriors.

Afrāsiyāb: The legendary Turanian king who fought Iran for 200 years beginning with the reign of Manuchehr and ending with the reign of Kay Khosrow.

afrin: Blessing, benediction, specific prayers of blessing in Zoroastrianism.

Ahriman: The evil spirit in Zoroastrianism.

Ahurā Mazdā (Middle Persian: Ohrmazd): The wise lord or lord of wisdom was the supreme god of ancient Iran as well as the uncreated god of Zoroastrianism, the creator of the universe and everything that is good and beautiful.

Airyanem Vaejāh (Ērānvēj): "The Aryan/Iranian Expanse," the ancient home of the Aryans and the Avestan people.

Alborz/Alburz: A mountain range in northern Iran.

Ameretat (New Persian: Amordad, Mordad): One of the six holy immortals in Zoroastrianism associated with immortality, which acts as the protector of plants. It appears as Amordad or Mordad, the fifth month of the year in the Iranian calendar.

Amesha Spentas: Holy and beneficent immortals created by the god Ahura Mazda to assist him with the act of creation.

Amu Darya: Persian name for the Oxus River.

Anāhid-Ardashir: Temple in Istakhr (Estakhr) in Fars province in southern Iran.

Anāhitā (Anāhid, Nāhid): Iranian goddess of the waters.

Andarz: Collection of advice or moral instruction.

Angra Mainyu: The evil spirit in Zoroastrianism.

Aniran: Non-Iran, non-Iranians.

anjoman: Association.

Antiochus: Name of several kings of the Seleucid dynasty.

Anushirvan (Middle Persian: Anøshiravan): "Eternal Soul," the title of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I.

Anxi/Anshi: Chinese name for Parthia.

Aparni (Parni): A Scythian group within the Dahae confederacy whose members lived along the Ochus. Arsaces (Arshak), founder of the Arsacid (Parthian) state, hailed from the Parni who invaded and captured Parthia.

Arbela: City of Irbil in present-day northern Iraq.

Ardashir/Ardeshir: The name of several Achaemenid and Sasanian kings that appears as Artakhshacha in Old Persian, Ardakhshir in Middle Persian, and Artaxerxes in Greek.

Ardavan/Ardawan: The name of several Arsacid kings that appears as Artabanus in the writings of the Greek and Roman authors.

Arda Viraf: A Zoroastrian priest of the Sasanian era who wrote a book in Pahlavi that describes his vision of heaven and hell.

Ardvahisht: *See* **Asha Vahishta**.

Aredvi Sura Anahita: Strong Immaculate Anahita, goddess of waters.

argbed: Fortress commander during the Sasanian period.

Aria (Old Persian: Haraiva): An Iranian province in the Achaemenid Empire corresponding with present-day northwestern Afghanistan.

Ariyaramnes (Old Persian: Ariyaramna): The great-grandfather of the Achaemenid king Darius I.

Arman Shah: King of Armenia.

Arsacids: Also known as the Parthians, an Iranian royal house

founded by Arshak (Arsaces) in 247 BCE, ruling a vast and powerful empire until 224 CE.

Arsames (Old Persian: Arshama): Grandfather of the Achaemenid king Darius I.

Arshak (Arsaces): Founder of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty.

Artabanus (Ardavan): Name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty.

Artaxerxes (Old Persian: Artakhshacha): The name of several kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty.

arteshtār: Warrior in Middle Persian.

arteshtārān: Warriors, estate of warriors, members of the army, members of the second estate.

arteshtārān salar: Head of the estate of warriors.

Aryan: Noble, Iranian.

arzbad/arzbed: Chief of the royal harem.

asabarā: Horseman, Persian cavalry, during the Achaemenid period.

ashā: Truth and justice as upheld by Ahura Mazda.

Ashā Vahishtā (Middle Persian: Ardvahisht): One of the six holy immortals associated with best truth/order/righteousness, which acts as the protector of fire. In New Persian it appears as Ordibehesht, the second month of the year in the Iranian calendar.

Astvihad: A demon of death in Zoroastrianism.

Astyages: According to Herodotus, the last king of the Median Empire.

Asura: Hindu god and the Indian counterpart of Ahura Mazda in the Hindu sacred hymns of the *Rig Veda.*

asvār/aswār: Cavalry, knight, in Middle Persian.

asvārān sālār/aswārān sālār: Commander of the cavalry.

ātash bahrām: Victorious fire, the highest grade of consecrated fire.

ātashkadeh: Zoroastrian fire temple.

athravān/asravān: Priest, clergyman, a member of the priestly caste.

Avesta: The holy book of Zoroastrianism.

Āz: Demon of greed.

āzādān/āzātān: Free, noble, noble estate.

Azhi Dahāka: A three-headed six-mouthed monster in the *Avesta* who appears as the tyrannical king Dahak or Zahhak in the legendary history of Greater Iran.

***Bactria* (Old Persian: Bakhtrish):** Iranian province corresponding with present-day northern Afghanistan.

baga: A word for "god." Also, Old Persian for lands given in fief during the Achaemenid period.

Bahman: A hero and a king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty of Greater Iran, son of Prince Esfandiyar and the grandson of King Goshtasp (Vishtaspa).

Bahram/Wahram/Wahran: "Victory," name of a *yazad,* name of the 20th day of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar, and the name of several kings of the Sasanian dynasty.

baj: Tribute paid to the Persian kings during the Achaemenid period.

Bakhtrish: Called Bactria by Greek and Roman sources, an Iranian-populated region corresponding with present-day northern Afghanistan.

bandag/bandak: Slave.

Bardiya: The second son of Cyrus II the Great.

barsom: A bundle of sacred twigs or grass tied together with a date-palm cord, held by a priest during religious ceremonies.

bazm: Feast, royal banquet.

bidakhshan: Viceroys.

Bishapur: A Sasanian city in the Fars province of Iran.

Boran/Puran: A daughter of Khosrow II, Boran/Puran was the queen and the ruler of the Sasanian dynasty from 630 to 631 CE.

Bundahishn/Bundahish: Translated as "Primal Creation," a ninth-century Zoroastrian religious book written in Pahlavi.

Būshyāstā/Bushyast: The demon of stupor, lethargy, and sleepiness in Zoroastrianism.

Cambyses I (Old Persian: Kambujiya): The king of Anshan and the father of Cyrus II the Great.

Cambyses II: The son of Cyrus the Great who ruled the Achaemenid Empire from 530 to 522 BCE.

Chao Chast: A mythical lake in Zoroastrianism.

chiliarchs: Commander of 1,000 during the reign of the Achaemenid dynasty.

Chinavat/Chinvat/Chinwad: A bridge that, according to Zoroastrian teachings, souls of the dead cross and where they are judged.

Chobin (New Persian: Chubin): Meaning "javelin," the title of the Sasanian commander, Bahram, who seized the throne and ruled for a short time as Bahram VI.

Chorasmia (Old Persian: Uvārazmīy): Iranian-populated province on the lower reaches of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) south of the Aral Sea.

Ctesiphon: The capital of the Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties in present-day southern Iraq near Baghdad.

dādvarān: Judges during the Sasanian rule.

daēnā: The word for "religion." In the Gathas, the term meant "the good vision."

daeva/dev: Evil beings.

Dahāe (Daāe): A Scythian group from which the Parni or Aparni and eventually the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty hailed.

Dahāk: Appears as the monster Azhi Dahaka in the *Avesta* and as the tyrant Zahhak in the legendary history of Iran.

dahyu: Meaning “people” or “nation” in Old Persian and used by Darius I in his inscription.

Daitya: A sacred river in Airyanem Vaejāh or Ērānvēj, the “Iranian expanse” and the ancient home of the Aryans.

Dakhmā: Also known as the Tower of Silence, a towerlike structure on which dead bodies were exposed to be devoured by wild birds.

Damāvand: The best-known mountain peak in the Alborz mountain range of northern Iran.

Dānu: A Scythian group living along the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya).

Dārayavaush: “Darius,” the Old Persian name of several kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty.

daric: Gold coin of Darius used during the Achaemenid period.

Darius (Old Persian: Dārayavaush): The name of several kings of the Achaemenid dynasty.

dashna: Gift paid to the Persian king during the Achaemenid period.

dastur: A high Zoroastrian priest.

dāvar: A judge.

Demetrius: The name of two kings of the Seleucid Empire.

Dēnkard: A ninth-century Pahlavi text that provides a survey of Zoroastrian teachings.

Dhu al-Aktaf: Meaning “the one who pierces shoulders,” the Arabic title for the Sasanian monarch Shapur II.

dibir/dipir: Scribe, secretary, a member of the bureaucracy during the Sasanian period.

dibiran/dipiran: Scribes, secretaries, members of the bureaucracy during the Sasanian era.

dibirbad/dibirbed/dipirbed: Chief scribe.

dibir wuzurg: Great scribe.

dihgān/dihqān: Class of landed magnates in the late Sasanian period.

Din Dabireh: Avestan alphabet, name of the traditional script used for writing the *Avesta.*

dizbed/dizbad: Fortress commander.

dozakh: Hell.

druj: Lie or untruth in Zoroastrianism, demon of the lie, embodiment of evil.

Dugdov: Mother of Zoroaster.

Ecbatana (Old Persian: Hagmatana): Summer capital of the Achaemenid and Arsacid dynasties, in present-day Hamedan (Hamadan) in western Iran.

Ērān dibirbad: Chief secretary of Iran.

Ērān drustbad: Chief physician of Iran.

Ērānshahr: Iran.

Ērān spahbad/spahbed: Commander in chief of Iran.

Esfandiyār: A son and crown prince of King Vishtaspa/Goshtasp, the patron of Zoroaster (Zarathustra), and a hero in Zoroastrianism and the legendary history of Greater Iran.

Farangis: Daughter of Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, wife of Siyavash, and the mother of Kay Khosrow, in the legendary history of Greater Iran.

Fars (Parsa, Persis): A province in southern Iran, the birthplace of the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties.

Farsi: Persian.

Farvardin: Name of the first month as well as the name of the 19th day of the month.

Ferdowsi: The greatest epic poet of Greater Iran and the author of Shahnameh (Book of Kings).

Frahāta: Name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty that appears as Phraates in the writings of Greek and Roman authors. New Persian: Farhād.

framadār: A steward of royal property during the Sasanian period.

Franghrasyān: A villain in the *Avesta* who appears as Afrasiyab, the king of Turan, in the legendary history of Greater Iran.

frataraká: Governor, the title of the rulers in Parsa (Persis) during the Seleucid era and the early Arsacid period.

Fravardigan: A 10-day all-souls festival at the end of the year immediately prior to the celebration of the Persian New Year, Nowruz.

fravashi: Soul of a dead person as well as the inner power in every being that maintains it.

gahanbars: The high festivals or the six major seasonal festivals of Zoroastrianism.

gah namak: Charter of ranks.

Garsivaz: Brother of Afrasiyab, the legendary king of Turan.

Gathas: Sacred hymns or poems of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) and the oldest section of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy scripture.

Gaumata: According to the inscription of Darius I at Bisotun, a pretender to the throne who claimed to be Bardiya, the second son of Cyrus II the Great.

Gaya Maretan/Gayomard: "Mortal Life," the mythical first man in the *Avesta* and the first man as well as the first king in the legendary history of Greater Iran. His name appears as Kayumars and Kiyumars in New Persian.

Gondi Shāpur: A major Sasanian urban center with an important medical center located in Khuzestan province in southwestern Iran.

gor (New Persian: gur): Onager, the title of the Sasanian king Bahram V.

Goshtasp (Old Persian: Vishtaspa): King of the legendary Kayanian dynasty, the first king to convert to Zoroastrianism, son of King Lohrasp, and the father of Prince Esfandiyar, one of the greatest heroes of Iran's legendary history.

Gotarzes (Middle Persian: Godarz): Name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty, as well as a hero in the legendary history

of Greater Iran.

Greater Iran: The Iranian populated regions, which in ancient times incorporated parts of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and present-day Afghanistan and Iran.

gund: Regiment, army, in Parthian and Middle Persian of the Sasanian era.

gund-i shāhanshāh: The regiment of the king of kings, an elite unit within the Sasanian army.

gund sālār: Chief of troops in the late Sasanian period.

Haft Sin: Seven Ss, displayed on the Persian New Year table.

Hagmatana: The capital of the kingdom of Media, called Ecbatana by the Greeks and Hamedan in New Persian.

haoma: The name of a plant with medicinal properties as well as the name of a *yazad* (divinity) of the same name who serves as its guardian.

Haoshyangha (Middle Persian: Hoshang, New Persian: Hushang): A hero in the *Avesta* as well as a king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty.

Haurvatat (Middle Persian: Hordad, New Persian: Khordad): Holy devotion, one of the seven holy immortals associated with wholeness/ health/protection. It acts as the protector of water. It appears as Khordad, the third month of the year in the Iranian calendar.

hazarbad/hazarbed: Commander of the royal guard during the Sasanian period.

Hecatompylos: Also known as Sad Darvazeh (City of a Hundred Gates), the Parthian capital at Shahr-i Qumis near Damghan in northern Iran.

Hephthalites: A nomadic group from Central Asia that repeatedly invaded the eastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire in the fifth century CE, defeating Persian forces in several battles during the reign of Peroz and eventually building a vast empire extending from Central Asia to India.

Heptad: Unit of Seven, a term that refers to seven holy immortals

who together with Ahura Mazda created the seven holy elements.

herbad/hirbad: A priest, originally a title used for higher members of the priestly caste.

homa: Royal bird of victory.

Hormozd: Name of several kings of the Sasanian dynasty.

Hoshang (New Persian: Hushang): King of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty who is credited with the discovery of fire.

Hukairya: A mythical mountain on top of which all waters and fountains of the world are located.

hutukhshan: Craftsmen and artisans.

Hyrcania (Old Persian: Varkana; New Persian: Gorgan): A region in northern Iran on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea.

Hystaspes (Old Persian: Vishtaspa): Father of the Achaemenid king Darius I.

Iraj (Ēraj/Ērach): A king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty of Greater Iran, the third son of Fereydun.

Istakhr/Estakhr: A district in the province of Fars in southern Iran that served as the birthplace of the Sasanian dynasty.

***izates* (*ezad*):** Title of the rulers of the kingdom of Adiabene centered in northern Iraq.

Jāmāsp: Also known as Jamasp-e Hakim, the minister and confidant of King Goshtasp of the Kayanian dynasty and a great proponent of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra.

Jamshid: One of the most important legendary kings of ancient Iran who appears as Yima in the *Avesta.*

Jashan/Jashn: A religious service in which an *afringan* ceremony is performed.

Jaxartes (New Persian: Syr Darya): Latin name for a major river in Central Asia.

Jeyhun: Arabic name for the Oxus River (Persian: Amu Darya).

kara: Word for "army" in Old Persian, the language of the Achaemenid dynasty.

karawān/karavān: Troops on the march, military column.

Karawān-i Ērānshahr: The army of Iran.

karshwar: "Continent" in Iranian cosmology. Earth is divided into seven of these.

Kāsaoya: Lake Hāmun in western Afghanistan and the eastern Iranian province of Sistan.

Katāyun: The queen of King Goshtasp of the legendary Kayanian dynasty.

Kavād: Name of several kings of the Sasanian dynasty.

Kāveh/Kāva: The blacksmith who raised the flag of rebellion against the tyrant Zahhak.

Kavi Husravāh: A king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty and son of Siavakhsh (Siyavash) and Farangis whose name appears as Kay Khosrow in New Persian.

Kavi Kavāta: The first king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty whose name appears as Kay Qobad in New Persian.

Kavi Usā: A hero in the *Avesta* as well as a legendary king of the Kayanian dynasty whose name appears as Kay Kavus in New Persian.

Kayānian: A legendary dynasty of Greater Iran.

Kay Kāvus: A king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty and father of the hero Siyavash.

Kay Khosrow: A king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty, grandson of Kay Kavus, and son of Siyavash.

Kay Qobād: The first king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty.

Khorāsān: A province in northeastern Iran that incorporated present-day northern and northwestern Afghanistan as well as southern Turkmenistan. At times parts of the southern regions of Central Asia north of the Oxus River were also included in the territory of Khorasan.

Khordeh Avesta: "Small/Little *Avesta,*" a prayer book with excerpts from the *Avesta.*

Khosrow (Middle Persian: Khusrau): Name of several kings of the Sasanian dynasty.

khrafstra: Creatures viewed as evil pests, including frogs, ants, spiders, and snakes.

Khshathra Vairya: One of the seven holy immortals associated with desirable dominion/power that acts as the protector of metals and the sky. It appears as Shahrivar, the sixth month of the year, in the Iranian calendar.

Khuzistan: A province in present-day southwestern Iran.

khvarnah: Divine glory, which appears as *farna* in Old Persian and *farr* in New Persian.

***khwarāsān spahbad* (*spahbed*):** Commander of the army of the east, a position created during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan.

Khwarazm/Khwarezm/Khwarizm: Called Chorasmia by classical sources, Khwarazm was an Iranian-populated region on the lower reaches of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) corresponding with the present-day territory of northwestern Uzbekistan and northern Turkmenistan.

***khwarwārān spahbad* (*spahbed*):** General or chief of the army of the west, a position created during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan.

kishvar: Region.

kurtash: Elamite word that generally refers to laborers and particularly craftsmen during the Persian Achaemenid period.

Kushān: The ruling dynasty of eastern Iran, Central Asia, and northwestern India during the first, second, and third centuries CE.

lashkar: Army.

Lohrāsp/Luhrāsp: A king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty of Greater Iran.

magupat: Magian.

magupatān magupat: Head magian, high priest.

magush: Priest, Latin *magus,* a member of the priestly caste during the Achaemenid period.

Mah: Central Media.

māh: Month.

Maracanda: Greek name for the city of Samarqand in Central Asia.

mart-i shahr: Citizen in Middle Persian.

marzbān: Margrave, frontier governor.

Mawara' al-Nahr: The land beyond the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in Central Asia. The term usually referred to the region between the Oxus and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya).

Māzandarān: A heavily forested region of northern Iran on the southern shore the Caspian Sea.

Medes: One of the first Iranian-speaking people who settled in present-day western Iran and founded the Median Empire.

Media (Old Persian: Mada): A province in western Iran and the birthplace of the kingdom of Media.

Median: The language of the Medes.

Meshān Shāh: King of Mesene, corresponding with the territory of present-day Kuwait and southern Iraq.

Mithrā: The ancient Iranian god of covenants and oaths as well as the sun god.

Mithradādkart: Citadel of Nisa, the first capital of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty near the city of Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.

Mithridates (Parthian: Mithradata, New Persian: Mehrdad): The name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty.

mobad/mobed: Zoroastrian priest.

mobadan mobad/mobed: Chief priest of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy during the Sasanian period.

Nāhid: New Persian for Anahita or Anahid, the goddess of waters.

Naqsh-e Rajab: An important historic site near Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis in the Fars province of Iran.

Naqsh-e Rostam: A major historic site in the Fars province of Iran, the site of the tombs of four Achaemenid kings of ancient Iran, the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (the Ka'ba of Zoroaster), and several rock reliefs and inscriptions from the Sasanian era.

nemroz: South.

nemroz spahbad/spahbed: Chief of the army of the south, a position created during the reign of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan.

Nisā: Mithradadkart, the first capital of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty located near the city of Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.

Nishapur: Neyshabur, a major urban city in Khorasan in northeastern Iran founded or rebuilt by Shapur I, the second monarch of the Sasanian dynasty.

Nowruz/Noruz: New Day, Persian New Year.

Ohrmazd: The Zoroastrian supreme god, which appears as Ahura Mazda in the *Avesta.*

Old Persian: One of the languages of ancient Iran, the language of the Achaemenid dynasty.

Orodes (Parthian: Urūd, New Persian: Orod): Name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty.

ostān: Administrative district.

Pabag/Papak/Babak: Father of Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty (r. 224–651 CE).

Pahlavi: Also known as Middle Persian, the language of many Zoroastrian texts.

pairi daeza: Old Iranian word for "walled enclosure," entering Greek as *parádeisos,* Latin as *paradisus,* French as *paradisus,* and English as "paradise."

pairikā: Witch, sorceress.

Parsa: The region of Fars in present-day southern Iran. The name of the province from which the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties hailed.

Pārsis: Zoroastrians from Iran who settled in India.

Parthia (Old Persian: Parthava): A region in northeastern Iran and a province of the Persian Achaemenid Empire corresponding with the western regions of the province of Khorasan.

Parthian: The language of Parthia and of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty.

Parthian dynasty: Also known as Arsacids, an Iranian dynasty that ruled from 247/238 BCE to 224 CE.

parvēz/abarvez: "Victorious," the title of the Sasanian king of kings Khosrow II (Khusrau II).

Pasargadae: Capital of Cyrus II the Great that also contained his tomb, located in the southern Iranian province of Fars.

pasti: Foot soldier, infantry, during the Achaemenid period.

payg: Foot soldier in Middle Persian.

payg/payadag: Infantry during the Sasanian period.

Peroz: Name of a king of the Sasanian dynasty, which appears as Piruz and Firuz in Persian.

Persepolis: The ceremonial capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire beginning with the reign of Darius I in Fars province in southern Iran.

peshak: Social estate.

peshōtanu: Grievous sins or the sinner who commits them.

Peshotan (New Persian: Pashutan): A son of the legendary king of the Kayanian dynasty, Vishtaspa (Goshtasp), and a hero in Zoroastrian teachings.

Phraates (Parthian: Frahāta; New Persian: Farhād): The name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty.

Pishdādiān: The first dynasty in the legendary history of Greater Iran.

Pourushasp: Name of the father of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster).

ram: "Joy," name of a *yazad* or a divinity as well as the 21st day of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar.

rashn: "Truth," "justice," name of a *yazad,* name of the 18th day of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar.

Ray (Rhagae, Ragha): An important religious and commercial center south of present-day Tehran in northern Iran.

Rig Veda: Hindu sacred hymns.

Rishti Vēga: Last king of the Median kingdom who appears in Herodotus's *Histories* as Astyages.

Rostam: The greatest legendary hero of Greater Iran.

Sad Darvāzeh (City of a Hundred Gates): One of the capitals of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty located near the present-day Iranian city of Damghan in northern Iran. Greek and Roman authors refer to the city as Hecatompylos.

Sakān/Sagān Shāh: King of Sakas, king of Sistan.

Sakas: Iranian nomadic groups of Central Asia.

Sakastana: Land of Sakas, Sistan.

Saoshyant: The savior of the world, one of the three future world saviors.

Sardis: Capital of the kingdom of Lydia in present-day western Turkey and the capital of the satrapy of Lydia during the reign of the Achaemenid dynasty.

Sasanians: The Persian dynasty that hailed from the Fars province of southern Iran and ruled a vast and powerful empire from 224 to 651 CE.

satrap: Provincial governor during the Persian Achaemenid rule.

Seleucia-on-Tigris: The first capital of the Seleucid state in present-day southern Iraq.

Seleucus: The name of several kings of the Seleucid dynasty,

including its founder.

Seyhun: Arabic name for the Jaxartes River (Persian: Syr Darya).

shāh: King.

shāhanshāh: King of kings.

Shāhanshāhi: One of the religious calendars of Zoroastrianism.

Shāhnāmeh: "Book of Kings," the masterpiece of the Persian poet Ferdowsi.

shahr: Province of an empire.

shahrabān: Governors.

shahrdārān: Local kings.

Shahrevar: "Desirable dominion," one of the holy immortals (Amsha Spentas) who acts as the protector of metals and the sky. It appears as Shahrivar, the name of the sixth month in the Iranian calendar, and the name of the fourth day of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar.

Shāpur: "The son of the shah/king," the name of several kings of the Sasanian dynasty.

Siavakhsh/Siyavash: A legendary hero of Greater Iran, the son of Kay Kavus, a monarch of the Kayanian dynasty.

Siyamak: A legendary prince and hero of Greater Iran, son of Gayomard, the first man, father of King Hoshang/Hushang.

Sogdian: A Middle Iranian language spoken in the Iranian province of Sogdiana situated in Central Asia and widely used on the Silk Road.

Sogdiana (Old Persian: Suguda): Iranian province lying between the two great rivers of Oxus (Amu Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr Darya), corresponding with the territory of present-day Tajikistan and parts of Uzbekistan.

spada: Word for "army" in the *Avesta.*

spah: Word for "army" in Middle Persian.

spahbad/spahbed: Chief of the army or general in Middle Persian.

spahbad spahbadan/spahbedan spahbed: General of generals, commander in chief.

Spandarmad: "Holy devotion," one of the holy immortals (Amesha Spentas) who acts as the protector of Earth; also, the name of the 12th month of the Iranian calendar (New Persian: Esfand) and the name of the fifth day in the Zoroastrian calendar.

spenta: Holy, beneficent.

Spenta Armaiti (Middle Persian: Spandarmad): One of the six holy immortals associated with holy and beneficent devotion that acts as the protector of Earth. In New Persian, it appears as Esfand, the 12th month of the Iranian calendar, and the name of the fifth day in the Zoroastrian calendar.

Spenta Mainyu: Ahura Mazda's holy spirit.

spenta mathra: Beneficent/holy word.

sudre: Sacred shirt in Zoroastrianism.

Susa: An important urban center in southwestern Iran that served as the winter capital of the Achaemenid Empire beginning in the reign of Darius I.

Syr Darya: A major river in Central Asia, called Jaxartes in classical sources.

Tahmures: A king of the legendary Pishdadian dynasty.

tan: Body, slave.

Tandorosti: A prayer of benediction, good health.

Tansar/Tosar: Wise priest of Ardashir I Papakan/Pabagan, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty.

Tāq-e Bostān: "Garden's Arch," a Sasanian site near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran.

Tāq-e Kasrā: "The Arch of Khosrow," the ruins of the palace of the Sasanian monarch Khosrow I Anushiravan in present-day southern Iraq.

Teispes (Old Persian: Chishpish): The great-grandfather of Cyrus II the Great, founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire.

Thraetaona: A hero in the *Avesta* who triumphs over the monster Azhi Dahaka. Thraetaona appears as King Fereydun in the legendary history of Greater Iran.

Tir: Name of the fourth month of the year in the Iranian calendar and name of the 13th day of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar.

Tiragan: Celebration in honor of Tishtar.

Tiridates: The name of several members of the Arsacid (Parthian) royal family.

Transoxiana: "The Land beyond Oxus," referring to the land lying between the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), corresponding with the present-day territory of Tajikistan and parts of eastern Uzbekistan.

Tur/Tuj/Toz: The name of one of the sons of the legendary King Fereydun.

Turān: A rival kingdom of Iran in the legendary history of Greater Iran, most probably the name of a Scythian tribe that became a generic name for nomads from Central Asia.

urvan: Soul.

Urwatatnara: The youngest son of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster).

Ushedar/Ushidar/Hushidar: One of the three future world saviors.

Ushedarmah/Ushidar Mah/Hushidarmah: One of the three future world saviors.

Uvarazmiy (Chorasmia): Iranian-populated province on the lower reaches of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) south of the Aral Sea.

vahisht/wahisht: Paradise.

Vakhsh: A river in Central Asia in present-day Tajikistan.

Valakhsh/Balāsh: Name of several kings of the Arsacid (Parthian) dynasty, which appears as Vologeses or Vologases in the writings of classical authors.

varenā: "Greed" or "lustfulness" in the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book.

vastryoshān: Cultivators, members of one of the social estates.

vastryoshān sālār: Head of the estate of cultivators.

Vendidād/Vīdēvdāt: One of the books of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book.

Vishtaspa: A king of the Kayanian dynasty, patron of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster). Vishtaspa's name appears as Goshtasp in New Persian.

Visperad: One of the books of the *Avesta.*

Vohu Manah (Middle Persian: Vohuman, New Persian: Bahman): One of the six holy immortals associated with good purpose/good thought/good mind who acts as the protector of the cow/animals. It appears as Bahman, the 11th month in the Iranian calendar.

wuzurgān: Nobility, grandees, during the Sasanian period.

Wuzurg Arman Shāh: Great King of Armenia.

wuzurg-farmadār: Chief minister, grand vizier.

Xerxes (Old Persian: Khshayarsha): The name of two kings of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty.

Yasht: One of the hymns of the *Avesta* honoring a particular deity or spiritual being.

Yasna: The sacred liturgical texts of the *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian scriptures, which include the Gathas, the sacred hymns of Zoroaster.

yazata/yazad: A created spiritual being, worthy of being honored and praised.

yazatas: Gods and deities in Zoroastrianism.

Yazdegerd: Name of several kings of the Sasanian dynasty.

Yima: A hero in the *Avesta* who appears as King Jamshid in the legendary history of Greater Iran.

Yüeh-chih/Yuezhi: The Chinese name for the Iranian-speaking Tochari nomadic groups who eventually created the Kushan Empire based in present-day Afghanistan and India.

Zab/Zav: A king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty.

Zahhāk: A legendary king of Iran known for his tyranny and brutality. He appears as the monster Azhi Dahaka in the *Avesta.*

Zāl: A hero in the legendary history of ancient Iran, ruler of Sistan, and the father of Greater Iran's legendary hero, Rostam.

Zarir/Zarer: A hero in the legendary history of the Kayanian dynasty, son of King Lohrasp, brother of King Goshtasp (Vishtaspa).

Zurvān: God of infinite time.

zurvān akarānā: Unlimited time.

Zurvanism: Ancient Iranian religious movement centered on the belief in Zurvan, the god of infinite time.

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